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SAINT WARREN

Warren Buffett, Wall Street's Fallen Angel

by

MICHAEL LEWIS

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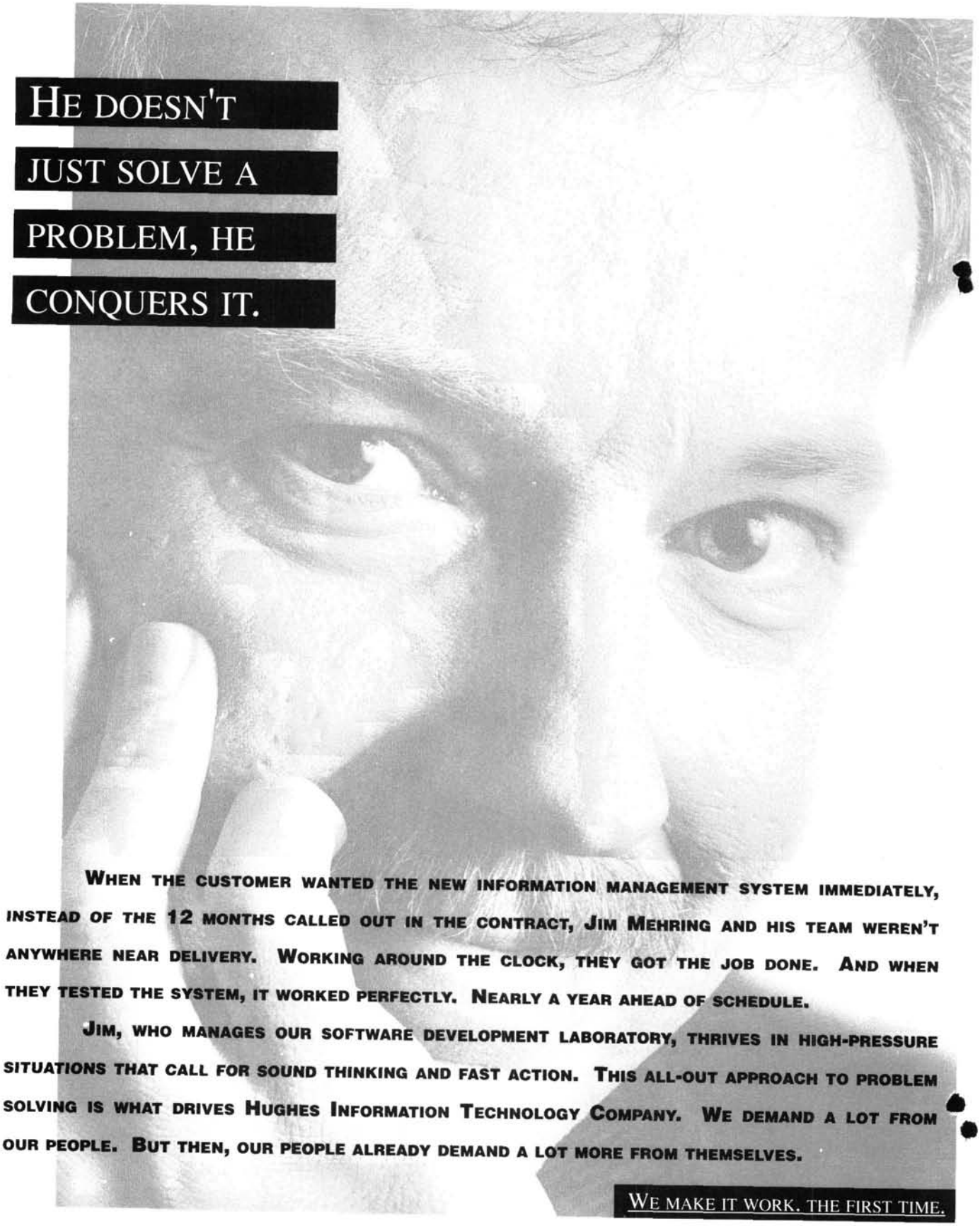

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

FEBRUARY 17, 1992

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CORRESPONDENCE

Faux pas

To the editors:

There is a good reason why Michael Kinsley finds that none of the Democratic presidential candidates passes his litmus test for economic correctness (TRB, "Untried and True," January 20). His touchstone assertion that "the paramount economic problem remains the federal deficit" is dead wrong. Our paramount economic problem is the low rate of public and private investment. Kinsley's advice to raise taxes and reduce domestic spending in the midst of a recession would further shrink investment and be economic suicide for the country, as well as political suicide for Democrats.

"Recessions happen," Kinsley shrugs, and tells us that any effort to put people back to work now will inhibit our ability to save and invest in the long term. But the real world does not recognize such rigid distinctions between short and long term. In fact, the current recession is doing great damage to our ability to achieve sustained growth. Today's slow sales reduce private incomes and public revenues, which in turn cause business and government to cut back further on investments necessary to boost tomorrow's productivity. Contrary to Kinsley's conventional wisdom, businesses do not invest because the savings rate goes up; they invest when they can see customers coming in the door with money in their pockets. Savings permit investment, but do not stimulate it. Typically, savings expand after incomes rise, not before. Attempting right now to raise national savings by cutting spending would be counterproductive. The reduction in sales would reduce incomes further, which would drive savings down even more.

The question is: What can we do to stimulate the economy in the short run that will also help to make us more productive in the future? The best answer is for the federal government to provide emergency fiscal relief to state and local governments, which would use most of the money to put teachers back to work, reopen training centers, and repair worn-out roads and bridges.

Yes, the deficit would go up, but such investments will increase income and tax revenue and pay for themselves in the longer run. It is as rational for governments to borrow for investment as it is for businesses. The problem with the Reagan-Bush deficits is not so much their size, but the fact that the proceeds for the borrowing were wasted on tax cuts and excessive military spending.

JEFF FAUX
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of the Economic Policy Institute.

Superman

To the editors:

In "The Tyranny of Choice" (January 27) Steven Waldman goes on a bit too long for a leg pull. It evokes those intellectual nasties who delight in saying hateful things, followed by a quick disclaimer: Only kidding!

A human who hates decisions is like a bird who hates flying. As such a bird is the natural prey of cats, so such a human is the natural prey of tyrannies. As recommended by Nietzsche, Waldman should stop squawking and submit happily to having his wings clipped by whatever Superman is left in the Marxist closet. (Only kidding!)

JAMES SEDGWICK
Oakland, California

To the editors:

TNR really didn't need to waste all those column inches on "The Tyranny of Choice" to illustrate the effects of entropy, although using all those words certainly is indicative of the process.

CHUCK RUCH
Kankakee, Illinois

Take that

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley's "Taking Exception" (TRB, January 6 & 13) illustrates several common misunderstandings about *Lucas* v. *South Carolina*, now before the Supreme Court, and on the scope of takings generally.

Initially, Kinsley fails to distinguish between two separate parts of the South Carolina Beachfront Management Act (BMA). The first is to protect the integrity of the South Carolina beaches by prohibiting the construction of sea walls. That part was *not* challenged in *Lucas*, and its constitutionality was explicitly defended in the brief that I prepared for the Supreme Court on behalf of the Institute of Justice. The construction of a seawall can, and perhaps should, be regarded as a nuisance properly regulated under the police power—the power of the state to prevent the commission of wrongs (including nuisances) by private individuals without having to pay them compensation.

Independently, the BMA prohibits constructing any permanent structure on beachfront property, wiping out the value of David Lucas's two lots. This prohibition was designed, as the BMA proudly states, to promote tourism and leisure activity, and to implement a systematic forty-year retreat of all development from the South Carolina beachfront. None of these goals has anything to do with preventing an assault on the beach. To invoke a constitutional distinction that Kinsley overlooks, this last restriction may serve a *public use*, but, if so, it is not a taking justified to prevent a private wrong under the *police power*. It is, as the trial judge correctly held, a taking for which compensation is required.

More generally, Kinsley argues that no court should ever try to fathom the crazy quilt pattern of benefits and burdens brought on by zoning and other land use regulations. He is surely incorrect about *Lucas*. Unlike a local zoning ordinance, the statewide BMA does not give any windfall to Lucas's neighbors. Indeed, under the BMA, if their houses are destroyed, they cannot rebuild either, even at their own risk. Any benefits here are for the public at large. Why shouldn't it bear the cost?

Next Kinsley incorrectly claims that the "distribution of property, unlike the distribution of speech, is a zero sum game." But the forced *re*distribution of property without compensation is typically a *negative* sum game. Here South Carolina imposed a broad ban on development, without inquiring whether it imposed major costs for trivial environmental benefits. Requiring compensation under the takings clause forces South Carolina to make an explicit comparison between what the private landowner has lost and what the state has gained. Where the gains are insufficient, the taking will be eliminated or scaled down because the state will be unwilling to pay a price that reflects the true social costs of its endeavors. The strict enforcement of the clause thus promotes sound political decisions, and should reduce the likelihood of windfall gains and losses that Kinsley rightly deplores.

RICHARD A. EPSTEIN
Chicago, Illinois

The writer is the James Parker Hall Distinguished Service Professor of Law at the University of Chicago.

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley's glib statements about regulatory "takings" miss the point. Probably no greater potential for the outright confiscation, reduction of value, or other "taking" of private property has existed in our history than that following the passage of the National Flood Insurance Program in 1968 and its sequels. Once again, the government

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has given statutory power to a gaggle of unelected bureaucrats and walked away mindless of the results.

How else explain what happened here in Northbrook, Illinois? One of the 18,000 towns mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Northbrook has never had a structure-damaging flood in its history but was nonetheless declared to have dangerous floodways and floodplains. The Illinois Department of Transportation, goaded on by FEMA, then unloaded on the village a regulation forbidding the rebuilding of those "floodway" homes (some 200 of them worth an aggregate of over $52 million) if more than 50 percent damaged by *whatever* cause (fire, tornado, a runaway Mack truck, an act of God, even a flood). IDOT has since backed down from confiscating those properties because of citizen outrage. But their new regulations are not all that much better.

A "characteristic flaw ... to be overly concerned with discreet injustices"? Balderdash.

ROBERT C. MEREDITH
Northbrook, Illinois

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley's wail about the "man who has no land to begin with" is beside the point. So is his valid complaint that conservatives will use the taking clause to their own nefarious ends. (This is news?) The real point—one that TNR and the Democratic Party seem to keep missing—is that middle-class homeowners are the biggest property owners of all, and they're fed up. A local, state, or federal agency can come along and take, condemn, or rezone at will without due process. Recent "forfeiture" laws have made the practice of seizing private property of all sorts even profitable, since the "taking" agency gets a cut of the loot. This isn't a Fortune 500 issue. Middle-class property owners (and small-business people) are tired of being powerless and victimized by agencies run amok. Economic rights, including protection from *unreasonable* "taking," and the liberal agenda are not mutually exclusive.

ROBERT LUHN
Albany, California

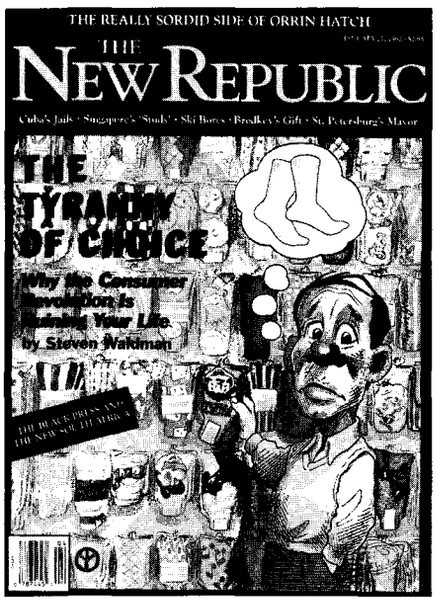
Autoimmunity

To the editors:

Nearly every reference to General Motors in Sidney Blumenthal's "Shorttermers" (January 27) was inaccurate. Our chairman, Bob Stempel, did not lay off 74,000 production workers, as was reported. Rather, nearly all the affected employees—hourly and salaried alike—will leave GM through retirements or other forms of regular and accelerated attrition. Should there be some layoffs, one would be hard pressed to find a more generous safety net than the one in place beneath the U.S. auto industry.

GM did not provide an $80 million compensation package for "the upper echelon of management" during 1991. That money went to non-executive salaried employees—from secretaries and clerks to middle managers—in the form of performance recognition awards.

And finally, the $2.1 million Blumenthal said Bob Stempel earned is about double what he was actually paid. When GM had an unprofitable year in 1990, he took a 50 percent pay cut to $1.07 million. This was largely because GM's executive bonus was eliminated for that year.



Stempel's 1991 compensation will not be reported until later this year, but it probably will be about the same, since the bonus has been eliminated again for 1991.

WILLIAM H. NOACK
Washington, D.C.

The writer is director of communications for the Washington office of General Motors Corporation.

Sidney Blumenthal replies:

The General Motors' spokesman engages in euphemism in discussing the layoff of 74,000 production workers. All independent news organizations, including *The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and *The Chicago Tribune,* have described it this way. The words used are "layoff," "slash," "cut." Noack is correct to point out that $80 million in bonuses was distributed to salaried professionals. Particularly targeted were engineers, in scarce supply. What he does not say is that these bonuses were announced at the same time as the layoffs, arousing intense feelings within the company and criticism from the United Auto Workers as well as from outside financial experts. Further, *The Washington Post* has reported that an executive bonus freeze did not affect the "119 top GM executives, ninety-eight of whom currently receive more compensation in retirement than they did while employed under a special bonus program approved by the same board several years ago." On his last point, Noack is somewhat evasive. According to *The Los Angeles Times,* GM's chairman, Robert Stempel, did indeed take a pay cut down to $1.1 million. But the previous year he had in fact earned $2.1 million. Even in his reduced state, he still makes about double what the chairmen of Japanese auto companies are paid.

Never a lender be

To the editors:

Sean Wilentz's excellent review "The Power of the Powerless" (December 23 & 30) may leave one mistaken impression, namely that the fears of Madison and other drafters of the Constitution regarding the potential tyranny of the majority were ill-founded. In fact, the Founding Fathers had some very concrete evidence of such majorities. Many will recall Shays' Rebellion, the confiscation of Loyalists' homes and property following the Revolutionary War, and other incidents in which disaffected Americans decided to take the law into their own hands.

But textbooks have tended not to notice the widespread practice among state legislatures during the economic depression of the mid-1780s of printing paper money—for the specific and avowed purpose of creating inflation and thus wiping out large portions of debts then outstanding. Because there were more borrowers than lenders, such activities proved highly popular with the voters.

The state legislature in Rhode Island, for example, answered the majority's demands by printing £100,000 of paper money. Lenders, whose loans were in the form of precious metals, were forced to accept paper money as repayment in full. (Abigail Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson in Europe that as a result of such laws, "Those who possess money are fearful of lending, lest the mad cry of the mob should force the legislature upon a measure very different from the touch of Midas.")

Perhaps it was such spectacularly irresponsible acquiescence to popular demand that made Alexander Hamilton

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Lazy he calls us

Lazy? Hey buster, are you calling American workers *lazy??*

That's what he said, all right. Japanese officials want to portray this recent remark by Yoshio Sakurauchi, speaker of the Japanese parliament, as the maundering of a senile nonentity. But it apparently reflects the views of the Japanese public. According to a *New York Times*/CBS poll, 66 percent of Japanese think Americans are "lazy" and only 13 percent think we're "hard-working." (Polling—now there's a great American export.)

The view that Americans are lazy is widespread in America, too. In this very journal, last week's Diarist was brooding on the subject, and praising Asian Americans for showing "that hard work is still rewarded here, in a country that needs more hard work."

Whatever ails the American economy, though, it cannot be blamed on laziness. Americans work astonishingly hard, compared with both our own recent past and most of our trade competitors. Juliet B. Schor, an associate professor of economics at Harvard, dishes the grim figures in her intriguing new book, *The Overworked American* (Basic Books). The average working American puts in 163 more hours a year than twenty years ago. That's the equivalent of an extra month of work. Men are working on average two-and-a-half weeks longer, women seven-and-a-half weeks longer. The pattern is consistent across various occupations and income levels. More women are working. More teenagers are working (53.7 percent). Average American work time is way up even if you include those whose work time is zero (retirees, students, the unemployed, etc.).

Commuting time is up, too—by an average of twenty-three hours (almost three working days) a year. Paid vacation time is down by 3.5 days a year. Despite the huge increase in the number of working wives, time spent on household chores has not declined. Women do a bit less, men do a bit more, the total is constant. Decades of technological advances from indoor plumbing through vacuum cleaners to food processors have simply illustrated Parkinson's Law: "With all these labor-saving innovations, no labor has been saved. Instead, housework expanded to fill the available time." (The one exception: microwave ovens.) Schor blames excessive American standards of cleanliness.

From their peak in the pits of the Industrial Revolution, working hours declined steadily until the 1940s. Everyone assumed this would continue. During the Depression, the Senate actually passed a bill mandating a thirty-hour work week to relieve unemployment. As late as the 1950s sociologists heartached over what Americans would do with all their leisure time. But the "leisure crisis" has turned out to be the exact opposite: people and society are frazzling from the stress of overwork.

Schor's take on all this is a bit odd. She sees the essential villain as consumerism, spurred by the capitalist system's ever receding mirage of material bliss. Convinced that the next purchase will satisfy us, we work harder to buy it, only to want something else. We are on a treadmill, "imprisoned in capitalism's 'squirrel cage,'" caught in an "insidious cycle of 'work and spend.'" Noting primly that "there are numerous examples of societies in which *things* have played a highly circumscribed role," Schor also observes that money can't buy happiness: the percentage of Americans reporting to pollsters that they were "very happy" peaked in 1957.

Schor's solution? A conscious social decision—implemented in a variety of government policies—to accept a lower standard of living in exchange for more leisure time. I wonder how many Americans would actually be interested in such a deal. Although Schor seems quite left-wing, her best allies here might be social-issue conservatives, eager for more women to stay home and tend to their families. How many of them will admit, though, as Schor frankly does, that their social engineering project implies a lower gross national product?

Make of Schor's vision what you will (and I don't dismiss it out of hand), you needn't agree about the evils of materialism in order to explain the increase in American working hours. As a new study by the congressional Joint Economic Committee ("Families on a Treadmill") points out, even in strictly material terms Americans are running

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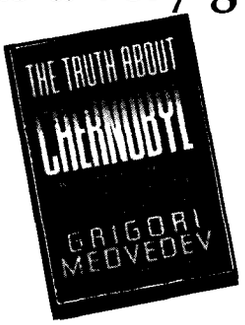
1991: It was a very good year....

National Book Award: Best Non-fiction Book



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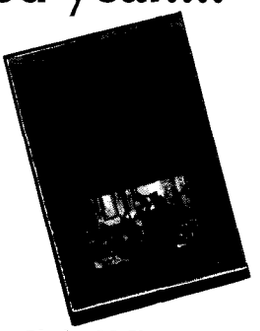

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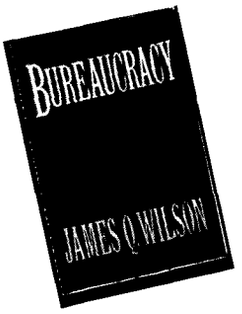
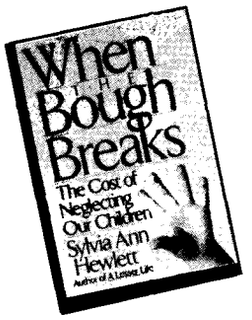


Louis Brownlow Book Award, National Academy of Public Administration



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 17, 1992

GIVE US A BREAK

One of the most popular bills making the rounds in Congress is H.R. 1414, introduced last year by Democrat Michael Andrews and now co-sponsored by 323 representatives, three-quarters of the entire House. The bill could cost the Treasury $8 billion a year, but it will make America's real estate developers very happy. It has bipartisan support: Democrat David Boren has sponsored companion legislation in the Senate, and the House Republican whip, Newt Gingrich, has made it part of his growth plan. President Bush backed Gingrich's package on November 26 and gave support to the basic idea of H.R. 1414 in his State of the Union address.

With all these characters in favor of it, it's perhaps unsurprising that H.R. 1414 is a truly dumb idea, bad both for the budget deficit and for healthy economic growth. Real estate developers, who traditionally have been the most tax-favored of all Americans, believe they got gypped in the 1986 tax code overhaul, which, according to Andrews, "skewed the playing field." Even if that's true—and it isn't—it's hard to believe that, with a huge deficit and a glut of office buildings, what this country really needs is a tax change that would add to the deficit and increase the amount of office space.

Most economists agree that one of the reasons it is taking so long to pull out of the current recession is that there's a massive oversupply of real estate—mostly office buildings—on the market. An inability to rent out space in these buildings or sell them at a decent price has led to the bankruptcy of thousands of developers and the insolvency of hundreds of banks and S&Ls. The reason for the glut is simple: in 1981 Congress voted to change the rules on depreciation, allowing investors to take huge paper losses, which could be used to offset tax obligations from other profitable pursuits.

Deals that produced these valuable losses were packaged into tax shelters, which flourished in the early '80s. Investors didn't care whether a real estate development had "economic" value—that is, that revenue from rents covered expenses. In fact, like Zero Mostel in the *The Producers*, they *wanted* to lose money, at least in the early years. And while empty office buildings (colorfully called "see-throughs") cluttered the skylines, investors did manage to cut their overall tax bills. As a result of the generous rules on depreciation, investment in commercial real estate climbed at a rate of 6.3 percent a year between 1981 and 1986 while industrial investment fell 2.7 percent a year, according to a study by Citizens for Tax Justice.

The great 1986 tax reform drove most tax shelters out of business—in part by bringing depreciation back into the realm of sanity (for example, you can now write off only 3 percent of the value of a building the first year, instead of 12 percent) and in part by instituting what were called "passive-loss" rules. These rules stop people who aren't actively involved in businesses in which they invest from using their losses in those activities to offset income they generate from their other lines of work. With a few minor exceptions, the rules define all rental activities as passive. The essence of the passive-loss rules, which are complicated to the point of being almost funny, is that the average investor can forget about real estate as a tax shelter. While the passive-loss provision may sound arcane, it has been the talk of the real estate business for years. Developers detest it because it makes raising money for their projects much harder; those projects now must be economically sound, not mere generators of tax deductions. The rules did not become fully effective until last year, and a Congressional Research Service study estimates that they will raise $8 billion for the Treasury in 1991 alone.

One argument that the proponents of the bill—who range from union leaders to the president of the International Council of Shopping Centers—are making is that the value of existing real estate will be enhanced (Andrews says by 3 percent to 7 percent) if the tax code allows the losses once more. Perhaps. But a more likely result will be the construction of more empty office buildings, which will drive down the value of existing properties. Even if modifying passive-loss did everything its proponents said it would do, we would still oppose it. Call us hardhearted, but real estate developers—who borrowed too much and built too recklessly in the 1980s—got us into this mess in the first place. Of all the folks now crying for tax relief, developers should be at the very back of the line.•

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NOTEBOOK

BUSHISMS OF THE WEEK: "Get the families involved. Help them learn to read—teach their kids to read and all of that. So this program and, gosh, your all's participation in it, I think sends a strong message to the rest of the country that parental involvement is real important. I worry, and I think everyone here does, about the pressures on family. So please stay involved and give these kids the extra ounce of energy and teaching and stuff that comes only from family." —January 21, touring a Head Start facility

"You can tell these Yale men—articulate devils, you know." —January 24, to the Young Astronauts Society

SEX AND THE CANDIDATE II: Two weeks ago we wrote a sadly prescient editorial, trying to set some ground rules for press coverage of the private affairs of public officials. Since then, new ones have been set. Unsubstantiated allegations, published for money, now merit live TV coverage with no other verification and no requirement that the accuser be questioned about her story. A leading journalist, "Nightline"'s Ted Koppel, can promote the story on network TV, with (again) no independent corroboration, under the pretense of doing a story about the media's coverage of the story. These are new lows, press-driven, without any real reference to the curiosity of the public, which remains, we are glad to say, turned off by the entire pseudo-scandal. Mercifully, a candidate does not seem to have been crippled for reasons utterly irrelevant to his campaign. But one illusion has been happily dispelled: the standards of even allegedly responsible segments of the electronic media are a fraud. There is essentially no difference in these matters anymore between Ted Koppel and Geraldo Rivera, except that Rivera doesn't mask his tackiness with the trappings of gravity.

STANDING BY: Bill Clinton has lost the vote of country music starlet Tammy Wynette thanks to an offhand remark by his wife, Hillary, on "60 Minutes." In an indignant open letter to the Clintons, Wynette writes:

> Mrs. Clinton, I, with no apologies, am as angry as I can be with your statement, "I'm not sitting here some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette."... Mrs Clinton, I was baby sitting my four grandchildren last night when you made your remarks about me. My eight year old granddaughter said 'Mamaw, why did she say that about you?' I truly was speechless. I had no answer. I simply said, 'I don't know, angel.'

And so on, for two pages. Because of her insensitivity, Wynette says, Mrs. Clinton may have "caused irreparable damage to the Governor's possibility of achieving his dream of becoming the President." For the edification of our readers, we merely reproduce the text behind the controversy: "Sometimes it's hard to be a woman/Giving all your love to just one man./You'll have bad times/And he'll have good times/Doin' things that you don't understand./But if you love him, you'll forgive him/Even though he's hard to understand... Stand by Your Man/Give him two arms to cling to/And something warm to come to/When nights are cold and lonely/Stand by your man."* Make up your own mind. For our part, we suspect Mrs. Clinton may have a point, and Mrs. Wynette may be doin' jus' a lil' bit o' overreactin'.

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STOP THE PRESS:

> **Rapid Rate of Descent Cited in Crash Of French Jet; More Clues Sought**
>
> —*The Washington Post*, January 23

> **Decades of Distrust Split Israelis, Palestinians**
>
> —*Ibid.*, January 21

HUFFIN' AND PUFFIN': "I am extremely proud of my predictions both in domestic and foreign policy," Brookings Institution Sovietologist Jerry Hough told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last March. Maybe now he's not so sure:

> The problem is that deep in our hearts, we hope Gorbachev will fail. We don't want to face up to the implications of the successful reform that is under way in the $2.8 trillion Soviet economy (bigger than that of Japan and the two Germanys combined). But Gorbachev is doing very well, and 1990 and '91 will be years in which we will have to come to grips with that reality.
>
> —September 18, 1990, *The Los Angeles Times*

> The notion that the Soviet Union will disintegrate in the foreseeable future is dubious in the extreme.
>
> —July 9, 1991, to the House Foreign Affairs Committee

> The test will come as the next election approaches in 1994. Gorbachev and Yeltsin both want to take credit for the benefits of reform. Each will try to blame the other for the pain and failures. Gorbachev is better positioned for this battle.
>
> —September 4, 1991, *The Los Angeles Times*

> Some of the declarations of independence—those of the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia, and Armenia at a minimum—surely are primarily symbolic.
>
> —September 6, 1991, *Los Angeles Times*

POT AND KETTLE: Every government in the world, it seems, feels entitled to reproach Israel. The more cruel the government, the more severe the reproach. Late last month it was China's turn. David Levy, the Israeli foreign minister, was in Beijing to sign an agreement opening diplomatic relations between the two countries. This was the last-minute price of admission for China to be able to participate in James Baker's big

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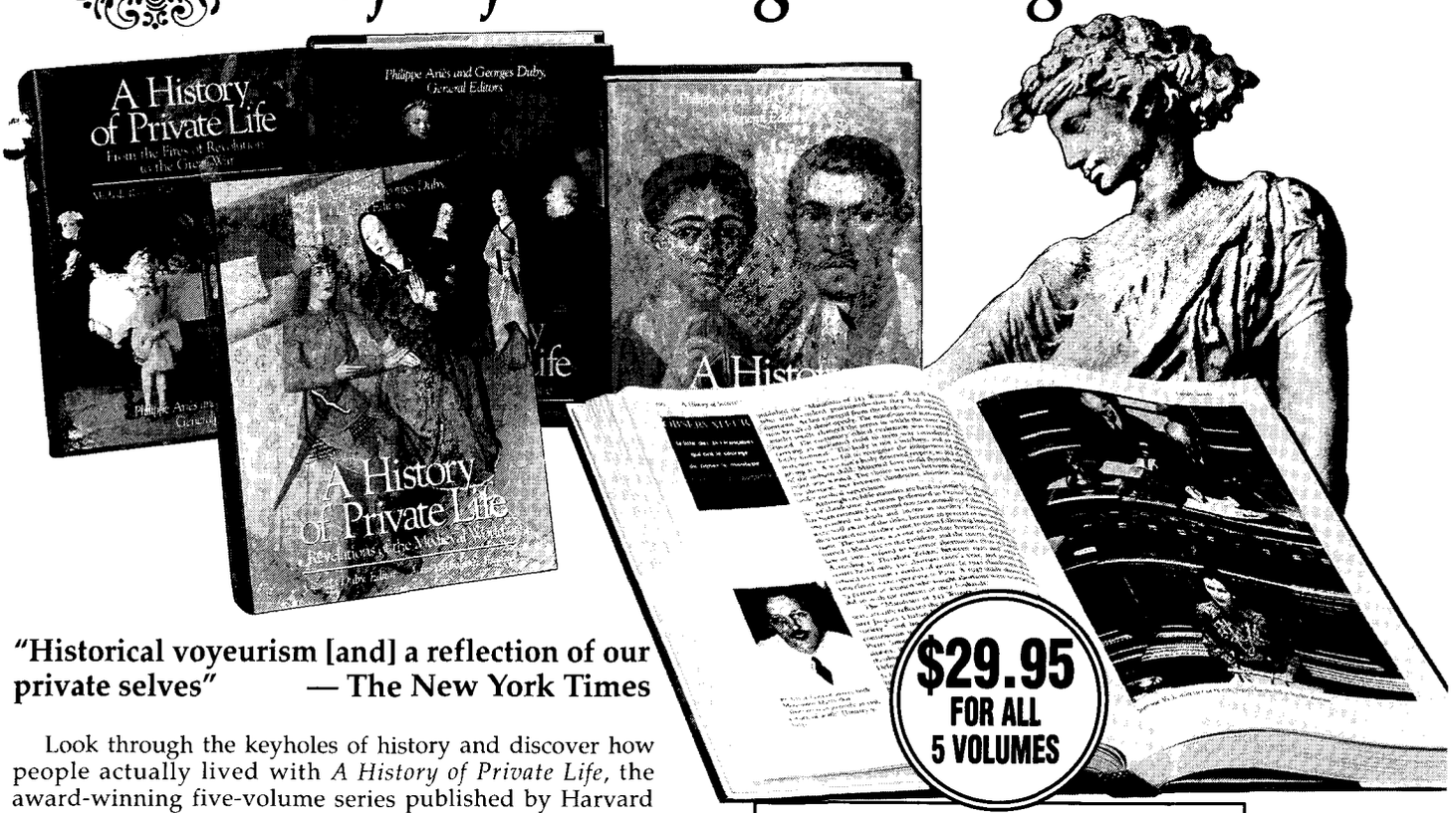

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Arab-Israeli talkfest in Moscow. But it wouldn't pay this price without hectoring its new partner. So Israel was instructed to withdraw from the disputed territories and exhorted on the right of self-determination for the Palestinians. An exquisitely polite man, Levy didn't retort by suggesting to his Chinese hosts that they go first and leave Tibet to the Tibetans.

GOODFELLOWS: Last year, in memory of our friend and contributor Marie Syrkin, poet, essayist, teacher, and Zionist leader, the Marie Syrkin Fellowship in Letters in Jerusalem was established. The Fellowship provides for a month's residence for a writer in Jerusalem at Mishkenot Shaananim, the restored nineteenth-century "tranquil dwellings" opposite the Old City walls, as well as transportation costs. The Fellowship is open to writers in all the forms, though the judges (Irving Howe, Cynthia Ozick, and Leon Wieseltier) will honor Marie Syrkin's preference for belles lettres over scholarly research. Applications should include a brief statement of the project for which the support is asked and a representative sample of recent work. They should be received at this office (The Marie Syrkin Fellowship, 1220 19th Street NW, Suite 600, Washington D.C. 20036) no later than April 15.•

LOS ANGELES POSTCARD

DON'T WALK

By Jim Holt

When a man is tired of New York, Dr. Johnson famously said, he should consider taking a holiday in Los Angeles. And so, as Manhattan's *douceur de vivre* had come to seem a bit cloying, I recently packed a few neoprene clothes and headed out to the West Coast for a respite. One should, after all, take advantage of the option while it is still available. Although boosters have dubbed Los Angeles "the city of the future," it is fairly well known that one day soon the whole show will drop into the Pacific Ocean amid violent earth tremors. ("When the ground starts moving," says Joan Didion, "all bets are off.")

That is, if it does not simply dry up first. "California will be a silent desert again," predicted J. P. Priestly a few decades ago. "It is all as impermanent and brittle as a reel of film." Evelyn Waugh viewed the prospect with especial relish, fantasizing about the day when "Bel Air and Beverly Hills will lie naked save for scrub and cactus, all their flimsy multitude of architectural styles turned long ago to dust, while the horned toad and the turkey buzzard leave their faint imprint on the dunes that will drift on Sunset Boulevard." But even with the five-year drought Los Angeles has been suffering through, the flora I saw as I drove around the city could not have looked more abundant, lush, or exotic, marred only by occasional graffiti on the trees.

Being a transient visitor, the dual threat of earthquake and drought held little terror for me. Nor could I get very exercised over L.A.'s vaunted crime problem. It is true that youth gangs armed with Uzi machine guns abound, and that "drive-by" shootings are a commonplace. Happily, though, these gang members reserve most of their enmity for one another, so the ordinary civilian has little to fear from them. Such is the hostility between the two biggest gangs, the Crips and the Bloods, that members of one gang will not pronounce the initial letter of the other; to a Blood, a cigarette is a "bigarette," and a Crip says "cecause" instead of "because." So, at any rate, I am informed.

I was more worried about encountering signs of history and culture, two of the things one comes to L.A. to escape. History is the easier to avoid. Los Angeles's collective memory resides in the La Brea tar pits near Wilshire Boulevard, which were formed by oil oozing up from the bowels of the Earth through cracks in the crust some 40,000 years ago. The oil congealed into an enormous quagmire, mostly covered with marshy rainwater, that has been trapping and preserving in its sticky depths all manner of antiquities ever since—from saber-toothed cats and woolly mammoths to (for all one knows) Judge Crater and Jimmy Hoffa. Because of the noxious gases that are constantly bubbling to the surface of these tar lakes—not to mention the danger of inadvertently becoming part of L.A.'s history—I stayed away.

Culture, despite the renaissance that people warned me was under way, did not much intrude on my holiday either. Long ago, thanks to the Second World War, Los Angeles pullulated with intellectuals and artists: Schoenberg and Stravinsky lived a few blocks from each other (though they were not on speaking terms); Mann and Isherwood were scribbling away; the Frankfurt School Marxists were in residence pronouncing on how L.A. represented the highest stage of capitalist false consciousness. Today there are art galleries everywhere: huge new acronymic museums like LACMA, MOCA, and COMA. There is opera and legitimate theater (L.A., unlike New York, affords actors the opportunity to support themselves in film and television while doing real theater). The city library keeps burning down, but they keep rebuilding it. Brat-pack movie stars give poetry readings—maybe "poetastings" would be a better term—in Hollywood clubs. Local pseuds prattle on about phenomenology and poststructuralism, seemingly oblivious of the fact that both schools of thought are totally out of date.

Fortunately I was able to steer clear of all this cultural recrudescence too. In fact, the only brush with culture I had during my trip to L.A. was a visit with David Hockney, who represents one of the twin peaks of civilization

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on the coast (the other of course is Billy Wilder, the greatest living director). Mr. Hockney looked like being in great shape, having kicked his habit of smoking a hundred or so cigarettes a day and taken up walking the equivalent of several miles each morning on a motorized treadmill he keeps in his studio, to the tune of military marches. He had also acquired an amazing computer gadget that enabled him to create quite sophisticated paintings electronically; to my great regret, the demonstration picture he did for me, titled "J[illegible] Holt's Still Life," was upon completion stored in the computer rather than printed out, so I was not able to make off with it.

I had a few adventures while staying at Mr. Hockney's house in Hollywood Hills. Once I went out for a walk. Evidently this is simply *not done* in Los Angeles. The streets were devoid of non-vehicular traffic. Every house I passed had a sign out front saying *armed response.* People who drove by looked at me with squinty, suspicious eyes. I felt like a drifter, a serial murderer, a *Rasta-man!!* Presently I was accosted by the only other pedestrian in Los Angeles—who, incredibly enough, claimed to have known me years ago in New York. I should have started running when I heard him calling my name, because once he was upon me politeness left me no choice but to hear out his lugubrious spiel about getting off drugs through the aid of some ghastly twelve-step program. I thought back to Billy Wilder saying, "Here you don't see friends unless you stop at the same red light," and began to appreciate the point.

Then I went out to Mr. Hockney's little house on the beach at Malibu, where he frequently retires to paint the sea—Giverny West, and one of the most blissful spots on earth. There the adventures continued. I was treated to the unique taste experience of Marmite for the first time in my life. I blew up a gilded tea cup in a microwave. I abetted an amateur fireworks display on the boardwalk, which briefly attracted the attention of the Malibu police. It was *most excellent!*

The high point of my trip, however, came when Mr. Hockney took me on his fabled "Wagner drive." One of the key ingredients is the artist's candy-colored Mercedes convertible, which is equipped with a bank of a dozen speakers and a CD player in the trunk controlled by means of a little computer on the dashboard. The route, some fifty miles in all, begins along the Pacific Coast Highway with a series of von Suppe waltzes, followed by "The Star-Spangled Banner" and Leonard Bernstein's "America" from West Side Story. (Mr. Hockney is nothing if not patriotic.) It continues into Malibu Canyon with an hour or so of orchestral music from *Lohengrin* or possibly *Parsifal.* Mr. Hockney choreographs the drive with great brio, slyly slowing down or speeding up around the hairpin curves so that the most dramatic vistas of misty layered mountains highlighted by the brilliant sunset coincide with climaxes in the music. It is nature elevated to the level of kitsch, and *totally awesome.*

It was with considerable sadness that I departed the next day from (to steal a line from my close friend Steve Martin) "this sceptered isle, this other Eden, demi paradise, this blessed spot, this earth, this realm, this Los Angeles" for the dreary gray isle of Manhattan.

JIM HOLT is a frequent contributor to TNR.

Bush's state of illusion.

GET REAL

By Robert Shapiro

To anyone who has had the advantage of not being in Washington for the past twelve years, George Bush's State of the Union address might have seemed a polished, even stirring, oration. Of course, it was no such thing. A desperate give-away of money he doesn't have to anybody whose votes he wants to buy was given vague intellectual coherence by borrowing equally from the two failed ideologies of the 1980s: Reaganism and big-spending liberalism.

Bush rested one leg of his compromise on tax planks that were vintage early Reagan. His scheme for resuscitating the economy begins with an even larger than expected capital gains tax break, which will accomplish nothing except enrich those who own stocks today and impoverish the Treasury for years to come. Also back is a form of accelerated depreciation, based on the odd notion that markets work better when the tax treatment of capital investments is disconnected from their economic value. There would be more tax breaks for real estate losses by passive investors, the dim idea that helped trigger the avalanche of tax shelters in dubious projects that today stand as half-empty office towers and abandoned, suburban strip malls (see "Give Us a Break," page 7). Together, these three changes would excise the core of the 1986 tax reform. The only industry they would truly revive is the tax shelter sector.

Business is also promised a three-month moratorium on regulation, a reprise of Ronald Reagan's 1981 two-month regulatory sabbatical to review the work of Jimmy Carter's appointees. No single element of his plan is more laughable than this, since the regulations Bush would now review or halt are those of his own administration's and Reagan's. He also has an answer to the clamor in Congress for broad, individual tax relief: an additional $500-per-child tax deduction that overlooks the half of the middle class living in households without children. And in Reaganesque fashion, he ignores the notion of converting the children's deduction to a tax credit that could provide equitable relief to everyone;

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instead, his $500 deduction would be worth $140 per child to the affluent 40 percent or so of families in the 28 percent income-tax bracket, only $75 to the half of all families in the 15 percent bracket, and nothing at all to parents who earn too little to owe income taxes. He decreed one other change—he cut the amount of income tax withheld for most people, but without cutting their income taxes. This shifts part of most people's 1993 refunds to their 1992 paychecks by reducing their current withholding—something everyone can do by themselves without an executive order.

Bush's answer to demands for national health-care coverage was no more inspired. Embarrassed at doing nothing for eleven years to address the problem, the president now proposes to help defray the costs of medical insurance with a new tax credit of up to $3,700 for poor families and a new tax deduction for the middle class. It is a proposal without a plan to reform the system that produced the problem—and an ineffective proposal at that. Experts say that in many places, no one sells individual policies anymore; when they do, most poor people can't shell out thousands and wait for government reimbursement. And it is equally clear that the tax deduction won't keep up with double-digit medical inflation; it may even worsen it.

Bush meets the legal mandate to pay for his tax breaks with accounting gimmicks, plus a little help from the defense budget. First, he claims billions in revenues from cutting the capital gains tax rate, a preposterous and damaging assertion. Second, he claims billions more from a scheme to let people shift their IRA savings to new accounts, so long as they pay tax on the transfer. This tactic also simply shifts billions in revenues from future years to the present, leaving larger deficits a few years out.

This damn-the-deficit tack (he finally got to our $400 billion black hole as Step 7 in his domestic program) is part of the second leg of Bush's compromise: his sly sidle toward big spending—often on programs he has cut for three years. More money for Head Start and other supports for poor children are good ideas favored by educated suburban voters. Environmental programs are set to relive the heady, expensive days of Carter's term, with special attention to the needs of California, Florida, Texas, and other key states. Billions more for the Space Station is a strange priority for a troubled economy, but not in electoral-vote-rich Texas. On it goes.

On higher spending and higher deficits, Bush shares the ground with Congress's orthodox liberals. Howard Metzenbaum, for one, is pressing a plan for $50 billion in new spending this year and another $50 billion in the next four years, plus uncalculated billions for more college grants, housing, and national health insurance. Similarly, Edward Kennedy is talking up his own program for $40 billion in new spending this year and another $170 billion over the seven years following. And they share with Bush a magic-bullet answer on financing more spending: charge it to the peace dividend.

A postliberal State of the Union would dismiss both sides of Bush's dismal compromise and focus on the elements of productivity that move up average people's incomes. Begin with spending priorities that Bush slights: increased national investment in the country's common economic resources—mainly infrastructure, research and development, and far-reaching and costly reforms for education. These increases have to be matched by a commitment to cut federal spending for consumption. To begin, phase out farm subsidies; tax rich retirees for the insurance value of their Medicare coverage; tax 85 percent of Social Security payments for high-income people and reduce their COLAs; auction grazing and mining rights on public lands; end taxpayer subsidies for businesses, like most Export-Import Bank credits and much of the deduction for business meals and entertainment. These changes can help finance new initiatives. The deficit itself can be controlled by legally holding the growth ratio of federal spending to no more than the rise in per capita incomes, except during recessions.

Business is right that much current federal regulation is a burden; but the heart of it is not overregulation, solvable by some ridiculous freeze, but *mis*regulation. Postliberal regulation starts with a concept of what's wrong and how to fix it, not with some outdated need to create a rival power to business. Take environmental regulation. The aim is to produce a healthy environment at the lowest cost with santions and incentives, without bureaucratic micromanagement. The postliberal approach would tax businesses and people for the pollution they produce, using the proceeds to restore the air, water, and land.

Bush and most Democrats imagine the peace dividend as a credit card for more tax breaks or more social spending. But its size should be based on a serious new strategic analysis of post-cold war threats to our interests, not on the extent of our domestic needs. And whatever their size, defense cuts shouldn't become excuses for more narrow-interest spending. Most towns that lose bases actually gain, because the military leaves behind valuable assets such as buildings, water systems, deepwater harbors, and rail lines. Instead of devising new subsidies or bailouts for contractors, the government should focus on shifting resources from obsolete defense R&D to a new program for supporting basic research in new commercial technologies—a civilian version of the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency.

In the end, Bush seemed even more shortsighted than usual. His compromise lacks any appreciation that it's too late for new deficit stimulus to affect this recession, and that going ahead anyway will hobble us with more debt when the uptick comes. Or, more likely, he cynically realizes this, and aims for re-election anyway. Like the outmoded right and left with whom he hopes to bargain, he has not met the real challenge: restoring a basis for solid, long-term growth.

ROBERT SHAPIRO is the vice president of the Progressive Policy Institute.

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An unexcellent adventure.

BILL AND TED

By Sidney Blumenthal

The bizarre unfolding of the "scandal" that nearly enveloped Bill Clinton mainly accounts for his survival. At each stage, by virtue of their chronology, the events had a strangely muffled impact. The vortex of contemporary sexual politics—from Gary Hart to Clarence Thomas—provided the indispensable backdrop against which all the elements in the drama were referenced. Without knowledge of the semiotics of past scandals, the latest one is indecipherable.

In the candidates' debate of January 19, before any "scandal" was considered to have been revealed, Clinton seemed to have dealt decisively with the rumors of his infidelities. When Cokie Roberts, the moderator, suggested he might be undermined by stories about his private life, he firmly—and successfully—dismissed the idea and subsequently vaulted into the position of frontrunner. One poll recorded his popularity at 39 percent. Thus, at the very beginning, the kernel of the scandal had been raised and dealt with. In fact, before he began campaigning, Clinton and his closest aides had known they might have to confront the issue. He admitted to them that he had committed adultery, unlike Hart, who stonewalled even his most trusted aides; and Clinton's staff worked out a tentative plan. The hidden issue was also not a surprise to the press corps, which had known of the rumors for years, which was why Roberts so cavalierly raised them—without any proof before the public whatsoever. This was a parody of the stakeout in which all the actors were more or less scripted beforehand. Surprise would have had to have been feigned.

Tales of Clinton's extramarital affairs were quite fantastic, the first published in *Penthouse* a month before Roberts's probe. Shortly afterward, the *Star* followed with a brief piece about the amorous claims of a former Little Rock TV reporter turned country-western backup singer, Gennifer Flowers. Clinton denied its allegations. Once again, the issue was rehearsed and dismissed. Then, a week before it hit the supermarket stands, the *Star* faxed to major news organizations claims of fresh revelations: "My 12-Year Affair With Bill Clinton; Plus The Secret Love Tapes That Prove It!"

For a couple of days Washington resembled the erstwhile Kremlin during a state crisis. All was calm on the surface so as not to disturb the public, while behind the turreted walls everyone was in a frenzy. The responsible press tried stoically not to allow the tabloid to drive its coverage. Small notices of the *Star* story were buried in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Not a word was broadcast on CNN. But the white foam in the press shark tank was rapidly churning. Then the most deliberate and serious of the news shows, "Nightline," broke ranks, with Ted Koppel hosting a program about the media reaction to a story that much of the media would rather not be reporting unfiltered. This was a disingenuous effort to exploit the issue without actually touching it. But it also curiously worked to Clinton's advantage when Koppel's guests—political consultant Mandy Grunwald and professor Larry Sabato—put him on the defensive for even considering the question: it was the first time in the postmodern political circus that the backlash to a story occurred before the story itself.

The principal issue the Democrats have pledged to address in the 1992 campaign is the falling living standards of the middle class. But the spread of the K-Mart economy has been accompanied by a parallel explosion of a tabloid culture, not only at the checkout lines but on television. Politics itself has been consumed in the maw of Oprahfication. Pseudo-news shows such as "Hard Copy," "Inside Edition," and "A Current Affair" have set parameters for public discussion that the broader political world has only just begun to assimilate, and still vainly attempts to resist.

So Clinton was Geraldoed. Daily his numbers began tumbling in New Hampshire, from 39 percent to 37 to 34 and, by Super Bowl Sunday, down to 25, according to the American Research poll. But there was a peculiar permutation in his plummet. None of his major opponents, who might have profited from his crisis, was gaining. In fact, even after barrages of television commercials, they were falling too. Bob Kerrey went from 18 percent to 10 percent. Tom Harkin rested like an anchor in single digits. Only Tsongas, the favorite son from neighboring Massachusetts, was rising. He had become a safe harbor for the fretful undecideds.

The stakes in Clinton's gathering crisis were enormous. If he were to win New Hampshire, the nomination would be virtually his, given the existing momentum in his column and likely effect of a Super Tuesday victory. If he fell, there was simply no strong replacement available. The process of nomination makes it nearly impossible for a late entrant. By now, the filing deadlines are past for primaries that will select more than 30 percent of the delegates. There is, moreover, no smoke-filled room where party bosses can convene to pick a candidate; indeed, there are no party bosses at all. Without Clinton, the field would likely turn into a black hole. Thus the "scandal" is more than the latest media epiphenomenon. The Democrats' ability to challenge a disintegrating Republican president has come largely to rest on the outcome of this version of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Within Clinton's campaign, the main locus of decision-making quickly boiled down to his circle of long-time friends, who are also his principal campaign

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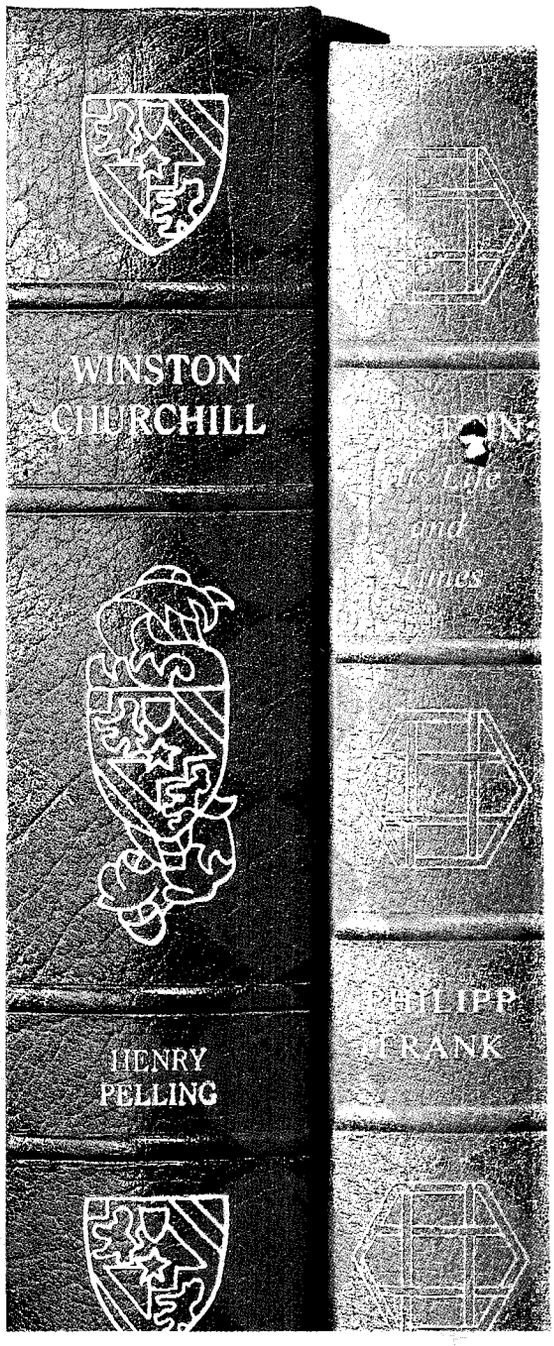

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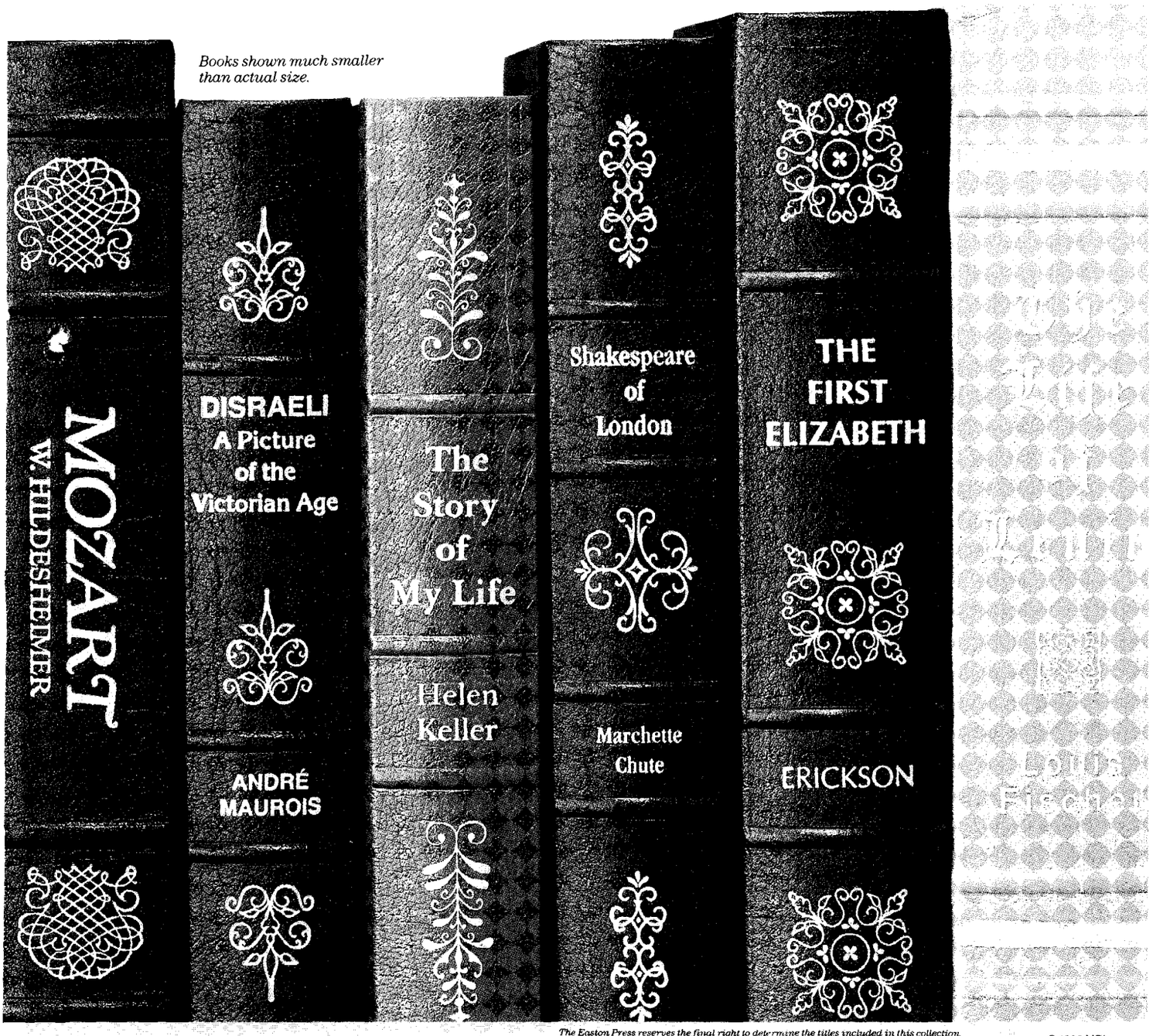

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advisers in New York and California. The large apparatus that had been assembled in Washington and across the country was mostly tangential. Clinton himself, according to those who were with him, remained calm throughout—almost an article of faith of his personality.

Despite the uproar, the candidate's schedule was still being rigorously followed, as though all were normal. What would have been a major event in the campaign—Clinton's appearance before Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in D.C.—seemed like a distraction. Bill and Hillary Clinton decided they would deliver the state of their union address on "60 Minutes," immediately after the Super Bowl. They knew they would not control the editing process, but, according to sources close to them, believed they had no options. For most of the public, the sight of the besieged couple would be their introduction to Clinton and his message. In granting the interview, Clinton grasped that he was treading on a number of precarious faultlines. The example of Hart set many of the themes. If Clinton denied everything, he would be unbelievable. If he told too much, he opened the floodgates of investigation into the far crevices of his privacy. If he was too angry—especially about the press—he would appear too defensive. The perils for Hillary Clinton were as varied. If she sat quietly by or simply echoed his lines, she would appear his passive victim, like Lee Hart. If she was too harsh, she might seem cold and unfeeling.

The "60 Minutes" interview was succinctly and sordidly pointed. Minimal context was provided. What was about to be seen was barely made intelligible. Suddenly, the candidate and his wife were thrust before the public, seated beside a fireplace, for a cozy trial. Clinton's defense implied knowledge on the part of the audience: "I think the American people, at least people that have been married for a long time, know what it means and know the whole range of things it can mean." Hillary Clinton, in one swoop, defined herself and the issue in terms that took it out of the hands of the press: "I'm not sitting here—some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette.... And you know, if that's not enough for people, then heck, don't vote for him." Most important, they appeared to be what they said they were: involved in a non-storybook marriage.

But the matter was still not over. The day after Super Sunday, Gennifer Flowers presented herself before the press: the woman in red, trimmed in black to match the roots of her frosted hair. "I loved him," she said. "He absolutely lied." She would answer no questions about the many discrepancies in her own story, and she played edited tapes, featuring scratchy voices purporting to be conversations between herself and Clinton. Clearly, if this is Clinton, he knows her as more than a vague acquaintance. But all of his statements are highly ambiguous and prove nothing conclusively.

The timing of these events conspired to favor Clinton. Unlike Clarence Thomas, he went first—before the accuser could establish herself as a sympathetic presence. And if any woman was sympathetic, it was not the gaudy Gennifer Flowers, but Hillary Clinton. The real feminist canceled out the fake one. Hillary Clinton's statements had an authentic air to them, making her husband's defense appear more than politically expedient. While George Bush—all whiteness—talks about "family values," the Clintons demonstrate them by confessing to adultery.

Immediately after Flowers's performance, volatile tracking polls issued their instant judgments. Overnight, Clinton spurted in New Hampshire from 24 points to 30, retaking his lead from Tsongas. An ABC News poll showed only 10 percent were less likely to vote for him—voters the Democrat probably would not get in any case. Eighty percent believed he should continue to make the race. The public, it seems, is staging a reaction against its own prurience. Its puritanism is not exactly dispelled, but shifted onto another object: the press.

Clinton is not saved yet. His problem has become more than merely the story that is doggedly pursuing him. It is that he has reached the limit of his smooth politics. His greatest skill so far has been to avoid conflicts to attain his ends. He has learned through defeat how to compromise without giving up his essence. And his natural tendency is to serve as mediator. But now his story must be about more than squaring ideological circles or his ingratiating personality. The argument for Clinton on the logic of electability must be superseded. His nomination seems far less inevitable, and his momentum has to be linked more clearly to something beyond momentum itself. Politics as usual has been destroyed by means of a lurid spectacle. Clinton cannot sustain himself by seeking safety in what already has been lost. The danger is that the party will find itself married to a wounded nominee who may redouble his caution to avoid the pain. •

THE PRESS

MOONDOGGLE

By Charlotte Hays

To my amazement, one day I found myself working for the Moonie-backed *Washington Times*, D.C.'s other daily newspaper. I needed a job, and since the *Post* was hardly eager to offer me one, I readily accepted an offer from the *Times* in 1988 and shortly thereafter became the paper's gossip columnist. Still, as you might expect, there was one highly gossip-worthy topic I avoided while writing "Charlotte's

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Web," as my column was called: namely what it's *really* like to work at "the Moonie Paper." I've returned to amateur gossip status, but I still can't stop the urge to spill the beans. So, since my last paycheck has long since cleared the bank, here goes.

The *Times* had been started in 1982 as a conservative alternative to *The Washington Post*. By the time I began working there, the newspaper had developed a sort of reverse cachet among my liberal friends, who read it to savor the more outré right-wing columnists such as John Lofton, a born-again Christian. (Lofton, who always wore dark glasses around the newsroom, was ever on the prowl for heresy. A new reporter, who'd made a facetious reference to the devil in a story, was startled the next day when Lofton materialized at his desk to announce, "Satan is real!") The weirdness at the *Times*, however, was not confined to its staff. Our pièce de résistance, of course, was the Reverend Moon himself, the pudgy Korean evangelist and anti-Communist who owns the paper. The Rev, as we called him, was always doing embarrassing things like going to prison for tax evasion, embracing a Zimbabwean who claimed to be the reincarnation of his deceased son, or, the very worst, proclaiming himself the Messiah. He was our Boo Radley.

We rarely saw the big-time Moonies, but the lower-level ones were everywhere, dim and goofy but ultimately annoying because they all looked like they knew something we didn't. On some days we'd arrive at the paper's posh, movie-set offices stuck far away on New York Avenue to find the balcony around the newsroom thronged with unidentified Asian visitors, smiling, bobbing up and down, and gesturing as they snapped pictures of us down in the newsroom. But who were these people? The Faithful? Financial backers of the newspaper? Just plain Korean tourists? Nobody ever asked. Whenever *Times* editor in chief Arnaud de Borchgrave, the former *Newsweek* foreign correspondent, appeared on the scene, they'd go berserk. Amid the unintelligible chatter, you'd hear joyful exclamations of "Arnaud de Borchgrave! Arnaud de Borchgrave!" and the cameras would click even more furiously. Another sight that seemed to set them off: a black person working at a computer.

Because I don't drive, I took the *Times*'s van from Union Station to the newspaper—the Lunar Shuttle, as it was dubbed. Most of the riders were members of the Church—we speculated that The Rev didn't pay them enough to buy cars. The non-Moonies would climb aboard grimly, dreading the imminent onslaught of Moonie conversation. A spilled cup of coffee could trigger a lively debate of how not to spill your coffee. One Moonie, a countrified woman who wore earmuffs in season and out, frequently dispensed cupcakes and other goodies and laughed aloud, for no particular reason, at intervals. No amount of rudeness deterred her friendly advances.

When the *Times* started, about a third of the editors and reporters belonged to the Church. One, after being sent out to cover a fire, produced a memorable lead: "A 39-year-old Fairfax man was punished by God Thursday night for smoking in bed by burning to death." The result was banishment to the library, soon nicknamed "Moonie Haven." You had to experience the library to believe it. A reporter who asked for the first name of an Iranian imam received the answer: "Ayatollah."

While the Moonies certainly gave the place an aura of the absurd, de Borchgrave was the dominant personality when I was there. Arnaud had covered all the bloody debacles of his day—from the Congo to Vietnam—for *Newsweek*. His prima donna ways, fabulous expense accounts (he's said to have hired elephants for transportation), and perpetual tan (he reportedly carried a reflecting mirror into combat) were legendary. Arnaud seemed more like the *Times*'s maître d' than its editor, a sort of ambassador-at-large, the tiny jewel in the Moonie crown. "As Juan Carlos once told me off the record . . . " was a typical Arnaud conversational opener.

During Arnaud's early days he developed an eccentric habit—spending the night in a bed in his office. There were rumors of nude jumping jacks, which Arnaud has denied. But, as he admitted to Joan Mower in GQ magazine, the newsroom did once get a gander at the editor in chief exercising in his jockey shorts. He thought it was too early for anybody to be around. It was disconcerting to go in to talk to Arnaud and find him on his unmade bed, busily scribbling one of his infamous "Arnaudgrams"—the missives on yellow cardboard that were regularly zapped to every *Times* editor. Arnaudgrams were generally niggling corrections of a story, often illustrating his superior knowledge or social contacts. I once got an Arnaudgram chiding me for not going to enough parties. For something Arnaud particularly liked, there was a gallant "multithanks."

As part of what appeared to be a move toward more aggressive reporting, Arnaud rehired 29-year-old John Podhoretz, who'd left for a brief and unhappy stint at *U.S. News & World Report*. Podhoretz belonged to a network that formed a definite set at the *Times*, the children-of-neocons set, which included Danny Wattenberg, Liz Kristol, and Tod Lindberg, an honorary minicon because he'd been Podhoretz's roommate at the University of Chicago. John's parents are Midge Decter and Norman Podhoretz, and John was affectionately known as "John P. Normanson," because Arnaud always proudly introduced him as John Podhoretz, Norman's son. I owe my brief career as a Washington gossip columnist to Podhoretz. I had been writing features when one day he took me to lunch in the executive dining room and said something characteristically understated like, "I offer you fame." John's own columns were so dreadful that they actually acquired a perverse following. "Critic at Large" was regularly read aloud at the *Post* to the accompaniment of gales of laughter. Charlotte Allen, a writer for *Insight*, the *Times*'s sister newsmagazine, coined a neologism to

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capture the thrill of malicious joy inspired by John's prose: Podenfreude.

At the executive level, money flowed freely. People were always scurrying around trying to find, say, the right model of car fax for Ronald Godwin, who was always called "Dr. Godwin" and worked on that mysterious third floor, where the finances were "managed." Managed may be an overstatement. I remember going to an *Insight* anniversary dinner at Union Station. There was excellent food and wine for about 500 guests, costing an estimated half a million dollars. A few days later magazine staffers got a memo saying that the ceiling for raises would be 3 percent.

Last summer de Borchgrave handed over power to Wes Pruden, the managing editor. True to form, Arnaud did his Farewell Address twice—just in case anybody couldn't make the morning resignation, he went through it again that afternoon. Pruden and de Borchgrave, who spent much of their time refusing to speak to each other, couldn't have been more different. Pruden, the son of a Baptist minister, had grown up dirt poor in Arkansas and was proud of never having completed college. Apart from his eating habits—he would grab his eating utensils like a hungry raccoon and proceed to enjoy his vittles from about two inches above his plate, a riveting and much remarked upon spectacle—Pruden was best known for his editing of copy. It became known as "prudenizing." Reporters would pick up the newspaper to find that Spin Doctor Wes had given their stories a new, more right-leaning slant. Shortly after he took control, during the Clarence Thomas hearings, this got him in trouble. Pruden rewrote an article by Supreme Court reporter Dawn Weyrich Ceol to make anti-Anita Hill witness John Doggett—an unconvincing witness, even if you supported Thomas—the lead. Dawn resigned on the spot. The daughter of New Right maven Paul Weyrich, Ceol is no starry-eyed liberal herself. The episode, duly reported in Howard Kurtz's media column in the *Post*, was a major, morale-reducing faux pas at the prudenized paper.

Around the time of Pruden's ascendancy, another star was visible on the horizon. Yep, The Rev himself came to dinner last July. It's true that The Rev had appeared from time to time before. But it was usually late on a Friday afternoon or during the weekend, when the newsroom was practically empty. This time nobody had any advance warning. At the last minute invitations were put in the mailboxes of a select group of 200 or so. As I wasn't included, I was forced to rely on office gossip.

Apparently it was quite an experience. The dinner was ostensibly to introduce The Washington Times Corp.'s new president, Young Whi Kim, but The Rev stole the show, treating the crowd to a lengthy postprandial harangue. It was all about the money The Rev has poured into the *Times*. The Rev compared himself to the fuel that runs an engine—so much for the official line that the *Times* isn't owned by Moon but by members of his church. According to Jack Shafer's account in the Washington *City Paper*, The Rev pounded his fist on the podium, at one point becoming so overwrought that he grabbed the tie of Bo Hi Pak, who was acting as interpreter.

And then Moon essayed a little joke. Should he marry Wes Pruden off, he wanted to know. Then he allowed as how Wes is married to the *Times* (alas, dashing hopes of seeing Wes in one of those mass weddings). Then turning serious, The Rev asked, "Do you like me? Some people don't like me. You don't like me, do you?" When The Rev then asked them if they'd like to see more of him at the newspaper, there was a moment of silence before the room divided into two camps: clappers and non-clappers, each suspiciously eyeing the other. And, then, in a trice, The Rev got into his Rolls Royce and disappeared.

CHARLOTTE HAYS is a Washington writer.

Algeria braces for the worst.

MULLAH'S DAY

By Terence Wrong

In the shocking climax of the 1970s film *The Battle for Algiers*, the French General Massu's paratroopers seal off the Casbah and blow up a building in which a cell of National Liberation Front guerrillas that includes a 10-year-old boy is hiding. Before the debris has settled, the women of the city's Bab el-Oued district, looking on from their balconies, take up a piercing Arabic cry—a call to martyrdom meant to mock the French and their futile effort. In this romanticization of the Algerian war, women are full comrades in the anti-colonial struggle. Three decades later the same Algiers neighborhood is again at the center of a revolution. Only this time the women of Bab el-Oued are keeping a low profile.

Friday prayers are as tense as they have been since independence. Ten thousand faithful stand shoulder to shoulder in the alleys leading to the es-Sunna mosque. All are men, mostly working class. They are waiting for the sermon that will tell them whether to begin demonstrating. The voice echoing through loudspeakers onto the street belongs to one of the most charismatic leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Abdel Kader Hachani, who is now in jail. At the crowd's periphery, soldiers and police with plexiglass shields and visors listen intently. They too are waiting for Hachani's decision. Then it comes: "Our day is near. But we need patience. The regime will fall and we will have our Islamic state." The showdown will not be today. Soon the troops are climbing into armored personnel carri-

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ers. Hachani has appealed for calm and, so strong is the discipline of the FIS, the security forces know there will be no rioting. The men begin a final, hypnotic chant, kneeling and standing, kneeling and standing. At the end, when they raise their foreheads from the pavement, many are weeping.

This mournful atmosphere is in stark contrast to the mood in the city's tonier districts. In the days following the FIS's show of strength at the polls, university students and middle-class professionals met to form groups like "Save Algeria." For women the stakes were even higher. The Algeria that allows them to work, socialize, and dress as they choose is under assault. The FIS program to establish Shari'a—the rule of Islamic law—would require complete segregation of the sexes outside the home, the banning of alcohol and music in public, and the introduction of stonings, floggings, and amputations as legal punishments.

Nadia Kheddar, a university instructor, is hoping the army, having dispensed with the elections, will finish off the fundamentalists. "I was having nightmares. I didn't put on perfume for a week. I wore my worst slacks. I was in a state of controlled terror. It's not just wearing the *chador* that scared me. It would be the end of my life, my work. I couldn't speak to men. It would be the end of freedom. I couldn't receive anyone at home if he wasn't a member of my immediate family. I couldn't even travel without the authority of my husband, my father, or my son."

Hafedi Sherifi is married to a lawyer and has a 9-year-old son. Several of her son's schoolteachers have become fundamentalists. In class, students have been encouraged to report parents who smoke, drink, or play music. Recently her son came home from school and told her that since she was a woman she must eat dinner in the kitchen by herself. And he would not be kissing her goodnight anymore. "I could take them spitting at me in the street and shouting at me to 'cover up,' but this I cannot take," she says. Among fundamentalists, women without veils are called "Massu's whores." "Democracy is a lovely idea," she says, "but in the end we couldn't afford it."

Prime Minister Sid Ahmed Ghozali disagrees. A dapper technocrat, Ghozali was head of Sonatrach, the state oil company, and has been a staunch advocate of reform within the National Liberation Front (FLN) for more than a decade. He says Algeria will return to democracy and hold presidential elections in December 1993, when Chadli Benjedid's term would have expired. "The army does not oppose this, in fact, they support an early resumption of the democratic process," he told journalists over a meal recently. But unless the FIS is banned from running—a step the army reportedly favors—new elections are likely to produce another fundamentalist triumph. In the June 1990 municipal elections, the FIS won forty-one of forty-five town halls, giving it control of everything from street sweeping to voter registration. In last month's vote Islamic parties won 188 of 230 parliamentary seats in the first round. If the High Security Council hadn't scrapped the next one, they would have won easily the extra twenty-eight seats required for a majority in the 430-seat assembly.

In the salons of Algiers the consensus is that Ghozali wanted an FIS victory to discredit the FLN and relegate party hard-liners such as his predecessor, Mouloud Hamrouche, to the dustbin of Algerian history. If true, this part of his strategy worked brilliantly. After thirty years of corrupt one-party rule, the FLN won only fifteen seats. The military seems to share the public's low opinion of the party. Since the military-controlled government took power on January 12, the old nomenklatura has been excluded from the High Security Council and the High State Council, both hastily invented by Defense Minister Khaled Nezzar to assume the powers of the vacated presidency. The French-language press has been greatly amused at the spectacle of FLN officials whining about a coup d'état. There is growing pressure from within to dissolve the party.

But if Ghozali helped engineer the demise of the FLN, what did he have in mind for the FIS, the genie that has refused to go back into the bottle? In the days following the FIS's victory, Nezzar considered a power-sharing arrangement that would have left the fundamentalists in control of Parliament with Benjedid in the presidency. The idea was to avoid interfering with the country's new democracy and at the same time to give the FIS enough rope to prove itself incapable of coping with the crippled economy. What spoiled the plan and forced the army's hand was a meeting between Benjedid and Hachani during the first week of January at which the frightened president agreed to a purge of senior officers and civil servants on a FIS hit list. For his part, Ghozali has been prepared to take his cues from the Defense Ministry.

After a while Ghozali can grow on you. He is the most important civilian in the new government. He even has a plan to fight poverty. With fewer than 1 million Algerians living above subsistence level and unemployment at 25 percent, he is convinced that fundamentalism is merely the politics of despair. "We tried to do too much too quickly. We should have fixed the economy before holding elections," he says. He argues that if jobs and adequate housing can be provided, the disaffected will develop a stake in the system.

Ghozali says his program is a declaration of "an economic state of emergency." Currently, Algeria's annual debt is $25 billion. Most of this is short-term debt, which means that three-fourths of the country's $12 billion annual revenue from oil and natural gas exports goes toward interest payments. Restructuring this debt is a chief priority. The government also believes revenue can be increased by soliciting Western help in drilling for natural gas reserves in the south of the country. And with proper technology, production from existing wells can rise. But Ghozali admits it may take fifteen years to rebuild the economy. How, one wonders, does he hope to hold presidential elections in two?

Algerian society today is in the grip of a conflict that

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cannot be reduced to money or jobs. Many FIS leaders actually have vocations and marketable skills. Hachani was an oil engineer for the same state oil company that Ghozali used to manage. Hachani represents a different breed of mullah. Thirty-five years old, the handsome son of a middle-class businessman, he is fluent in French and English but uses only Arabic. His revolution, which would redistribute society's wealth from top to bottom, is about culture as much as anything else. If the Independence War evicted the French, Hachani and his ilk dream of banishing the Frenchman that still lurks inside each Algerian. For the young—75 percent of Algeria's population is under 25—the message is compelling. In its place, Algeria's rulers offer only tired slogans. Seen from street level, the theft of the elections in broad daylight has given the FIS a victory greater than the one it achieved at the polls. Now when Hachani or Abassi Madani or Ali Belhadj, the jailed triumvirate, cry "injustice," there's no answer. The regime has put in their hands a moral hammer with which to chip away at its legitimacy.

TERENCE WRONG is a producer for ABC News based in London.

The mob and your magazines.

PRESS GANG

By Bill Berkeley

Douglas LaChance was working himself into a pretty good lather, shouting, cursing, waving his hands. "It's an unproven charge," he sputtered. "Besides, the guy they said I was linked to is a dead man." Then he knocked over a cup of seltzer water, flooding his desk. The pool of liquid spread across the smooth surface and wrapped around two glass paperweights containing miniature front pages from the *Daily News* and the *New York Post*: "ROLL 'EM!" the *News* headline blared, reporting the end of last year's bitter strike at the paper; "YES!" cried the *Post*. "Union vote saves Post!" By the telephone was a foot-long model of a blue and white delivery truck of *The New York Times*. "Did I know the guy?" LaChance continued, alternately wiping and pounding the desk. "Yeah. I knew him. He's dead now. The guy's in the ground."

LaChance is president of the Newspaper and Mail Deliverers Union of New York and Vicinity, which represents 3,000 truck drivers who distribute newspapers and magazines to retail outlets in the nation's largest news market. He also was president in 1980 when federal prosecutors linked him to a reputed soldier in the Lucchese organized crime family named Peter "Petey Beck" DiPalermo, who is now deceased. LaChance was convicted of extorting hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash kickbacks from wholesale delivery companies in the New York region. He went to jail for five years, was paroled, and returned to work as a driver for the *Times*. Then last year, remarkably, he was re-elected president of the union. And in November and December he resurfaced in the pages of the *Times*, in articles that cited him as a key player in negotiations over staffing at the paper's new printing plant in New Jersey.

The emergence of a convicted Lucchese associate in labor negotiations with *The New York Times* was a vivid reminder of publishing's dirty little secret: its long-standing, deeply ingrained relationship with organized crime. That relationship is the subject of a two-year investigation by the Manhattan district attorney's office that is rapidly building to a climax. Earlier this month city, state, and federal agents raided the *Daily News*, the *Post*, the union's headquarters in Queens, and seven wholesale delivery companies, seizing payroll and circulation records. Similar seizures were carried out last October at the Queens warehouse of Metropolitan News, known as "the Met," the main distributor of the *Times*. Investigators say that wiretaps and video surveillance of mob social clubs have disclosed links between union officers and reputed members of the Lucchese and Bonanno crime families. "This is going to be deep, deep surgery," says one investigator. "We want to go right down to the bone on this one."

That is what prosecutors said twelve years ago when they indicted LaChance. But as LaChance's resurrection suggests, the mob has proved a resilient player in publishing. That has an impact on every newspaper and magazine reader. Rampant theft, waste, featherbedding and no-show jobs, outmoded and costly delivery practices, union-enforced monopolies—all these classic symptoms of mob penetration combine to increase the cost of distribution. They help explain why the *Times* raised its price to fifty cents last year and why *The Wall Street Journal* now costs seventy-five. They also help explain why both the *Post* and the *Daily News* have teetered on the brink of collapse for the last two years. The DA's investigation has turned up evidence that mobsters and their collaborators have skimmed between $8 million and $9 million a year from newspaper revenues, including $50,000 a day from the *Daily News* alone—potentially the difference between staying open and closing. They may even explain why it's hard to buy TNR in New York. "If you look at the industry, then you know who you have to deal with," one investigator said. "You have to be in bed with the mob to survive."

The odor of organized crime first wafted through New York's newspaper and magazine distribution industry in the 1920s. Moses "Moe" Annenberg, the legendary circulation chief for Hearst newspapers, had turned to Lucky Luciano, the young New York underworld boss and partner of Meyer Lansky, for help in enforcing sidewalk territorial rights for

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Hearst's fledgling *Daily Mirror*. Luciano soon had goon squads assaulting newsboys and delivery drivers, overturning delivery trucks, dousing newsstands with kerosene and setting them afire, and intimidating tobacco shop owners who sold rival papers. "The bad guys were invited into the industry back then and they never left," says Ralph Salerno, a retired New York police detective and an expert on organized crime.

The business is inherently susceptible to mob penetration because of the critical importance of timeliness: newspapers, like fresh fish, another industry long dominated by the mob, must be delivered on time or they lose their value. Anyone with the power to delay, like delivery truck drivers, has the power to exact a toll. And it's a cash business, a twilight world of cigar-box accounting and handshake deals. Today the business is a typical New York mix of the Old World and the Third World. An old-boy network of Jews and Italians built the union and the wholesale delivery companies in the early part of this century and has dominated them ever since. More recently, Indians and Pakistanis have operated the newsstands themselves, and Dominicans have opened up hundreds of *bodegas*, the small corner grocery stores that serve as newsstands in poorer neighborhoods and in New York's outer boroughs. "If somebody wanted to shake these people down, you'd never hear about it," says a mob expert. "They're afraid of the police." Not a few of the cash-rich *bodegas* are laundering fronts for the city's huge, Dominican-led cocaine trade. Many also run numbers rackets. These scams generate the money to kick back and pay bribes.

In addition to extortion, sources at all levels of the industry tell hair-raising tales of theft and chicanery. Drivers in the NMDU are widely accused of "swagging" or "tapping the bundles"—stealing one or two papers or magazines from every bundle and then reselling them at a discount to corrupt newsstand operators. On a route with thirty or forty stops, with magazines priced at $3 or more, "tapping" can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. Retailers are accused of either selling these stolen papers and magazines at a larger profit margin than they would otherwise earn, or returning them to wholesalers and asking for reimbursement. Wholesalers claim to lose tens of millions annually on fraudulent "returns." City inspectors estimate that such scams cost the cash-strapped city $30 million annually.

Then there are "phantom magazines"—magazines deliberately printed in excess of those on order, then surreptitiously delivered at a cut rate to newsstands in advance of the cover date, allowing retailers to "return" for reimbursement the magazines they actually ordered. "Thirty-five to 40 percent of the magazine business in New York City is phantom magazines," a tax official said. Finally, the distribution of hard-core pornography, a staple of New York newsstands, has long been linked to organized crime.

Two years ago Metropolitan News was bought by Hudson County News, the largest wholesale distributor in the Northeast, with a virtual monopoly in the New York metropolitan area. Hudson is now moving aggressively into the retail end of the business. Commuters will recognize the name from the slick new newsstands with blue neon signs that have opened up in Grand Central Terminal, Penn Station, and LaGuardia Airport. Hudson News is owned by Robert "Bobby" Cohen. In June 1981 Cohen pleaded guilty to making $37,000 in regular cash payments to LaChance.

Cohen's conviction and the subsequent growth of Hudson News have highlighted what the labor writer A. H. Raskin called "the maze of abstruse relationships" between labor and management in the industry—a subtle blend of bribery and extortion typical of industries penetrated by the mob. Union officials over the years have worked closely with the bosses and often become bosses themselves: the chief concern is marketplace stability. For example, LaChance's predecessor as president of the union, Carl Levy, left in 1976 to become executive vice president of Hudson News and later president of the Met. Levy himself pleaded guilty to receiving more than $100,000 in illegal payments from wholesalers while he was union president and of making more than $35,000 in illegal payments to LaChance and other union officials after he became a company executive. Things may be changing, however, now that Cohen has a virtual monopoly and times are tough for the union. Cohen is moving to hire Teamsters drivers on Long Island, and the union is suing to stop him.

LaChance, like many others in the industry, speculates that Hudson News and the Met are really "fronts" for the *Times* and other dominant publishers. By design or otherwise, the booming, if tainted, wholeseller does serve as a kind of buffer between the squeaky-clean publishers and the down-and-dirty business of getting their product to market. This is the gist of a $100 million antitrust suit filed last year by Hachette S.A. The French publishing giant, seeking to break into the New York distribution market, is alleging a conspiracy between Hudson, the *Times*, and affiliates of Time-Warner to secure a monopoly in New York's $200 million wholesale periodicals market.

Sitting at his desk in the union office in Long Island City, Queens, LaChance, who is now making $90,000, reflected on his conviction and punishment. "It happened," he said, his volcanic temperament in momentary check. "It's a part of my life. I came back home. I got back on my truck for the *Times*. I told the members, did I make a mistake? You bet your fucking life. It's my first three names: 'Convicted Labor Racketeer.' I accept my conviction. Was I supposed to be fucking executed?" He says he's not worried about any upcoming indictments. "I'm on parole, I'm being monitored," he says. "If I got mob ties, what am I doing on the fucking street?"

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Buffett's principles—and Wall Street's.

THE TEMPTATION OF ST. WARREN

By Michael Lewis

"I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good." —Adam Smith

I still remember the marvelous frisson on the Salomon Brothers trading floor in the summer of 1987 when Warren Buffett came riding in from Omaha to rescue our chairman, John Gutfreund, from his past. In an era in which money men found a seemingly unlimited number of financial temptations to succumb to, Buffett was the sort of ascetic rarely seen on Wall Street. He had made his name and his money the old-fashioned way, as a long-term investor in wealth-creating American enterprise. His angry sermons aimed at modern financial techniques had established him as one of the more acceptable faces of American capitalism. In his two-toned world there were good people who were useful to society, bad people who weren't, and not much room in between for the sort of charming rogues he was about to embrace. "If you want to make money," he was fond of telling business school students, "hold your nose and go to Wall Street."

Suddenly there was a delicious gap between what the moralist said and what he did. The annual reports of Buffett's investment firm Berkshire Hathaway had treated leveraged buyouts to a long critique as harshly skeptical as any ever published; Salomon Brothers masterminded several of the more sensational leveraged buyout disasters of the time, including those of Revco and the Southland Corporation. Salomon Brothers also peddled billions of dollars of ill-fated junk bonds; of the junk bond market Buffett wrote in an annual report that "as usual, the Street's enthusiasm for an idea was proportional not to its merit, but rather to the revenue it would produce. Mountains of junk bonds were sold by those who didn't care to those who didn't think." The Salomon Brothers trading floor throbbed with speculation; Buffett often lamented the cost to the U.S. economy of "casino-type markets." "To many on Wall Street," he wrote, "both companies and stocks are seen only as raw materials for trades." His pet solution to the problem—a 100 percent tax on short-term capital gains—would have closed overnight half an acre of the Salomon trading floor. Not that the prospect would have troubled Buffett, who was contemptuous of even the more legitimate activity of brokerage houses. "I never talk to brokers or analysts," he told Linda Grant of *The Los Angeles Times*. "Wall Street is the only place that people ride to in a Rolls Royce to get advice from those who take the subway."

Salomon Brothers stood for most of the things Buffett stood against, above all in its management's disregard for its shareholders. The firm's share price had fallen through a bull market; civil war raged on the trading floor; top employees regularly defected to other firms. There was talk in the ranks of ousting Gutfreund from within. And now—the reason for Buffett's appearance on the scene—corporate raider Ronald Perelman was making a hostile bid for the company. The many challenges to Gutfreund's authority ended with the arrival of Buffett's money. "We've got a commitment to vote with John," Buffett told *The New York Times* in September 1987, "and we hope he stays there a long, long time."

For $700 million and a job guarantee for Gutfreund, Buffett was given a security that combined the juicy bits of a stock and a bond. It guaranteed him a return of 9 percent a year, established him as the controlling shareholder of Salomon Brothers, and left him with about the same opportunity for huge gain as the ordinary shareholder—without the risks. Auctioned on the open market, the $700 million convertible preferred would have fetched anywhere from $850 million to $1.2 billion. His windfall came out of the shareholders' pockets, since his cheap option dilutes the value of the existing shares. Although a few of them sued, the deal never met the popular resistance it deserved, mainly because it involved Buffett. Public feeling was that if it was wrong, Buffett would never have done it; therefore it must have been right.

In effect the moralist had sold his reputation, without pausing to measure the man willing to pay such a price for it. Perhaps heartened by the critical success of the first foray, Buffett quickly made the business of saving CEOs from corporate predators a rule rather than an exception in his portfolio. He cut about $1.2 billion more of similar sweet, off-market deals with the chief executives of U.S. Air, Champion, and Gillette. Around the same time he became involved in

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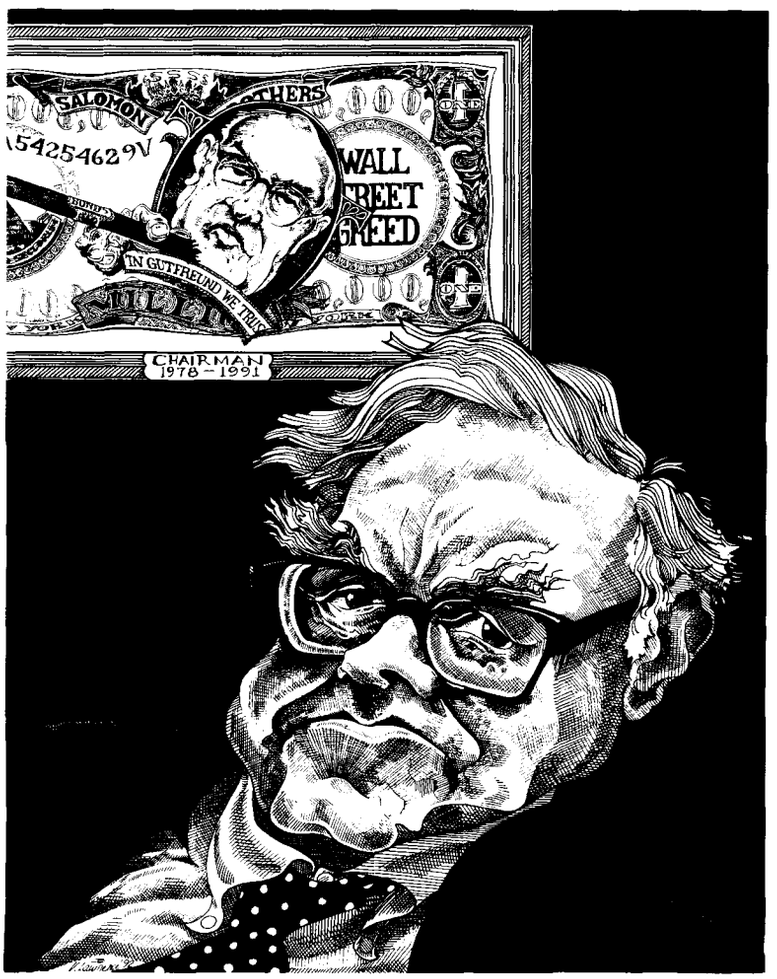
other business he might be expected to avoid or even to denounce, given his views on modern financial excess. In the middle of 1988 he broke with his strict rule of long-term investing and became an arbitrageur, which is to say he speculated on pending takeovers. The next year he made a convenient exception to his fierce disapproval of leveraged buyouts and offered financial backing to the most notorious team—that of Ross Johnson—aiming to borrow $25 billion for a buyout of RJR Nabisco. In 1990 he built a large stake in th junk bonds of the newly leveraged RJR Nabisco (which, as George Anders describes in his forthcoming book, *Merchants of Debt*, was so badly constructed that one year after its transformation it very nearly became the largest bankruptcy in history).



WARREN BUFFETT BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Of course there was nothing illegal about any of this; it was even ethical to some people's way of thinking. The trouble is that Buffett wasn't one of those people. But rather than simply acknowledge that he had been forced to bow to the two central facts of modern financial life—that a lot of profitable financial business was of dubious social value, and that a money manager wishing to attract funds could ill afford to shun profitable deals—Buffett continued to defend his moral turf. While bashing Wall Street in the abstract, he praised in the concrete whatever happened to drift into his portfolio. Thus, in the Berkshire annual reports, Gutfreund became a man of the highest integrity, RJR Nabisco an unusually sound leveraged buyout, and arbitrage trading a good, solid business. This is not to suggest that Buffett was insincere. He was very sincere. He clearly wanted to believe the hoary myth he helped to perpetuate—that success and virtue are the same thing. But because they weren't, he spent his 1980s backing slowly and charmingly into a corner.

Buffett's dilemma is partly a function of his own financial biography. Between 1977 and 1991 Berkshire Hathaway grew from a medium-sized pool of $180 million to one of more than $11 billion in risk capital. With this success came the new problem of where to put the money to work. About the same time Buffett seemed to become frustrated with the lack of opportunity in the stock market. "In the '70s I had a lot of ideas and very little money," he told *The New York Times* in 1990. "Now I've got a lot of money and very few ideas." He explained to his shareholders each year that the investment climate was less friendly than the last and asked them not to expect their money to grow at the 23 percent annual rate he had achieved over the previous twenty-one years. He even once suggested, in 1985, that his bogey was merely to outstrip the average returns of corporate America.

This modesty is inconsistent with Buffett's vanity about his reputation as an investment genius. The main threat to this reputation—other than his performance, which has lagged the market during the past two years—is the strong academic evidence that success in the stock market is no different from success in a coin-flipping contest. The suggestion that he is merely lucky drives Buffett to distraction. He regularly ridicules skeptical professors with a vaguely thuggish if-you're-so-smart-why-am-I-rich routine. (The reason he is rich is simply that random games produce big winners, but pity the business school professor on fifty grand a year who tries to argue with a billionaire.) While his little rhetorical victories may offer him short-term consolation, they also reveal the enormous pressure on Buffett to vindicate his precarious perception of himself.

As his fund grows Buffett is in the position of the roulette player who has amassed a great number of chips, a swarm of blond and buxom admirers, and finds himself with all the bets on the board—he can't beat the average because increasingly he *is* the average. This helps to explain the drift in his investment strategy away from the sort of long-term investments anyone can make to those available only to the privileged

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few—the very few he still disparages. He has gone to the casino owner, flashed a fat wallet, and cut a special deal. That he is only pretending to play the same game as the rest of us should make us suspicious of his more general pronouncements about the game.

The volume of demand for the Berkshire Hathaway reports has led the company to bind into two volumes the Buffett letters, 1977-1990. They are the modern equivalent of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, in both their spirit and their artfulness. The tone of the earlier reports is so different from that of the later reports that they might be the work of different people. In 1977 Buffett assumes his usual position that business is more than the unbridled pursuit of profit:

> A few shareholders have questioned the wisdom of remaining in the textile business which, over the longer term, is unlikely to produce returns on capital comparable to those available in many other businesses. Our reasons (for hanging tough) are several. 1) Our mills both in New Bedford and Manchester are among the largest employers in each town, utilizing a labor force of high average age possessing relatively non-transferable skills. Our workers and unions have exhibited unusual understanding and effort in cooperating with management to achieve a cost structure and product mix which might allow us to maintain a viable operation. 2) Management also has been energetic and straightforward in its approach to our textile problems ... 3) With hard work and some imagination regarding manufacturing and marketing configurations, it seems reasonable that at least modest profits in the textile division can be achieved in the future.

As his business becomes more slick and complex the reports grow more cloyingly earthy and honest. Buffett first assumes the tone of the philosopher-preacher in the early 1980s. By 1982 it is clear that he is the man rocking on his front porch playing to a gathering crowd, quoting everything from scripture to Samuel Goldwyn. In 1983 he begins to devote space to morally instructive businesses out of all proportion to their importance to Berkshire Hathaway's portfolio, in this case the stick-to-the-knitting virtues of "Mrs. B," the ninetysomething manager of the Nebraska Furniture Mart. In 1985, before announcing the closure of the above-mentioned textile mills, he got in a good joke or two about investment professionals. In 1986 he explains that he has switched to the new Cherry Coke as the official drink of the Berkshire annual meeting in Omaha. The next year he begins seriously to inveigh about the speculative excesses of Wall Street. And he has never stopped.

It has worked. The corrosion of Buffett by the demands of the market has been largely masked by his moralistic charm. The legend of the virtuous Midwesterner made good has been swallowed and regurgitated whole and often. Nowhere has there been any serious discussion of the shift in what Buffett actually does for his money. Some of the reasons for this are fairly transparent: the awe of journalists in the presence of a man worth $4 billion who is also obviously a nice man; the nostalgia for an earlier, simpler age of American capitalism; the need to buttress the belief that success isn't necessarily corrupting; the tendency of the business press to glorify mindlessly, on the assumption that mindless glorification is harmless.

But there is another reason: Buffett's media touch, which doesn't get nearly as much play as it deserves. He spends a lot of time talking to journalists off the record, and avoids turning up in the flesh in the many profiles of his person. A lot of people will even tell you that he is simply too busy to bother with his image. They should consider his recent battle with *The Wall Street Journal*, which dared to print a few facts inconsistent with the Buffett myth—that he keeps a mistress, hobnobs with celebrities, and enjoys his luxuries (fancy threads, limos, suites in the Plaza) as much as any billionaire.

The piece elicited a series of angry private letters from Buffett to the editors, and a single, fascinating correction. *Journal* reporter Laurie Cohen had mentioned in a sidebar that, soon after taking control of Salomon Brothers, Buffett had called his close friend James Burke, the former head of Johnson & Johnson. According to the *Journal*, Burke, who had weathered the Tylenol scandal, advised Buffett to "be contrite and honest. And tell the public and regulators about the mistakes—no matter how bad—as quickly as you can." It's hard to imagine anyone being upset about it being known he had given such sound, obvious advice. Yet six days later the *Journal* was forced to print an oddly hysterical letter from Burke, in which he said he "was appalled to read ... the opening paragraphs of your Nov. 8th story." According to him the conversation described had never taken place. Having failed to confirm the anecdote with Burke, the *Journal* was forced to apologize.

What was fascinating is that the anecdote had been told to eight *Journal* reporters in an off-the-record session by ... Warren Buffett. The effect of the retraction, as pointed out by the *Business News Reporter* (to which *Journal* staffers leaked the source), was to discredit the piece on the grounds of shoddy reporting. "Imagine," wrote Thomas K. Grose in the *News Reporter*, "the bitterness of the nation's most respected business daily having to confess that it quoted someone whom it never actually spoke with. Moreover the paper knows that either Mr. Buffett or Mr. Burke is not telling the truth, but has no way of letting its readers know that without violating the paper's confidentiality pledge to Mr. Buffett. If someone had plotted to manipulate the paper into such a no-win situation, it is doubtful that the sting could have been executed as well."

Among the consequences of the gentling of Warren Buffett is the current spectacle at Salomon Brothers. Last August the firm acknowledged that one of its traders had, by using fictive customer orders, broken the bidding rules in eight U.S. Treasury bond auctions. It turned out that Gutfreund had sat on this news for four months before an encroaching investigation forced his hand. In the subsequent public outrage there was a moment

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when it appeared that there might be a serious discussion in Congress and the Treasury about the conflicts of interest on a Wall Street trading floor. That ended when Buffett forced Gutfreund to resign and replaced him at the top of Salomon. From that moment it was assumed that with a man of integrity on the scene the business would pretty much reform itself. Ohio Representative Dennis Eckart spoke for his congressional colleagues when, in a hearing on the scandal, he said, "Mr. Buffett ... get in there and kick some butt." No one seemed to notice that he had been in there all along—that the managers responsible for the transgressions held their jobs only because Buffett put his good name behind them four years earlier.

Buffett's view now seems to be that the problems on Wall Street can be resolved by setting a moral example. The subtext of everything he has done is that the old Salomon was run by rotten apples. The firm very publicly cut long-standing ties to the oil trading tax fugitive Marc Rich. Buffett laid blame for the rule-breaking on the "macho culture" of the old Salomon Brothers and said that his new regime would tolerate incompetence but not impropriety. All of which played a bit too neatly to the current need to demonize financiers—and raised the question of why tax fugitives and testosterone freaks didn't much bother Buffett before the scandal.

Still, in the short run he is probably right. You can frighten people into behaving themselves for a while. But in the long run he's wrong. The financial revolution of the last decade introduced to Wall Street all sorts of temptations to abuse one's position. When socially unproductive behavior pays as well as it has, it isn't merely a matter of needing a few more good men. The dirty little secret on Wall Street is that the men responsible for its current reputation were not exceptionally bad. They were just ordinary people placed in unusual circumstances.

The cult of the investment genius promoted by Buffett is part of the problem, and has real social costs. The belief that there is such a thing as stockpicking expertise helps financial charlatans everywhere to flourish and leads investors to assume unnecessary market risks. It underpins the entire American investment advisory industry; without it an enormous amount of wasteful machinery—which Buffett himself knows to be wasteful—would collapse. People listen to stockbrokers, subscribe to newsletters, attend floating investment conferences, glue themselves to Financial News Network until the wee hours, read the fine print of *The Wall Street Journal*, and generally expend a fantastic amount of time and energy picking stocks in the mistaken belief that they can beat the market systematically. If one is looking for the root cause of the hysterical swings in the public mood toward Wall Street, one need go no further: they simply reflect the irrational expectations of the investment public.

What is really needed on Wall Street is not more "investment geniuses" or good men like Buffett but a reduction in the conflicts of interest to which financial people are exposed. There are ways to lessen the temptations in modern finance, but not without cutting into profits. I offer two examples. First: the takeover boom created a boom in extremely valuable inside information. Wall Street firms, which create and house this information, are also permitted to speculate in the relevant corporate stocks. Why? If Buffett were really interested in reforming Salomon Brothers, he would start by closing the arbitrage department. Second: firms like Salomon both buy bonds for their own account and sell them to investors. This inherent conflict of interest did not matter very much in the placid pre-Reagan bond markets partly because there was very little trading in the markets but also because bond salesmen tended to service the same set of investors for years and thus had an interest in keeping the customer happy. Now it matters very much. The new American taste for debt over the last ten years created a truly fantastic increase in both the size and complexity of the bond market; at the same time market forces and the new mobility of Wall Street salesmen transformed the bond business from one of relationships to one of transactions. This creates both the incentive and the opportunity to shaft the customer. Indeed, the abuse of customer names made the Salomon Treasury bond scam possible. So why not address this problem with, say, a proposal to separate bond trading from bond sales?

Thus we arrive at what might be called Buffett's Dilemma: the choice between doing good and making money. The source of a lot of the behavior that Buffett says he will no longer tolerate—the Salomon bond trading departments—also happens to generate the profits. Everything Buffett has done has strengthened their hands. He fired the head of the stock department, who was about as far removed from the scandal as a person can be. He installed a new board of directors consisting of nine mostly bond men already at or near the top, i.e., the elect of the old Salomon. He linked year-end bonuses more closely to the amount of money generated for the firm. He fired a lot of people outside of the bond departments, a hugely disproportionate number of whom were women—not exactly the way to geld the macho bull.

Though all of this will likely increase returns for shareholders and Buffett, it fails to address the real systematic problems. But is that so surprising when the reform of a business has been left to a man with a huge financial stake in it? One can sympathize with the fix in which Buffett finds himself. One cannot blame him for doing whatever is necessary to protect his $700 million. But it is absurd to cast his activity as a moral crusade. You'd have thought that our recent experience would have cured us forever of the idea of financiers as heroes—that their new, alarming tendency to drift into compromising positions would inspire in the republic only the urge to keep them under constant surveillance. Guess what? It hasn't. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Projects' Progress

At last Lincoln Center has a cinematheque. Some ten years ago the project was announced, along with the suggestion that the film theater might be located in the Newhouse Theater, then only sporadically used, underneath the Beaumont. I was one of the few who supported the idea, providing that a duplicate of the Newhouse be built in the huge unused backstage area of the Beaumont. This proposal brought howls of rage from those who noted only the first part. At any rate the Newhouse remains, now more frequently tenanted, and the cinematheque, called the Walter Reade Theater, is part of the new Rose Building at the Center. (The huge backstage area of the Beaumont is still, as far as I know, unused.)

The Walter Reade, named for the late distributor whose foundation helped the building fund, opened in December. I've waited to comment until I could go there a few times. It's an exceptionally pleasant place. It seats 268, and really seats them—in comfortably shaped chairs with good sight lines. (Cavil: the right arm of each seat has a wooden attachment to hold a carton of soda. These things look grotesque, and I haven't noticed that they are much used.) There's a roomy lounge for those waiting to see one of the four showings of four different films every day of the week beginning at 2 p.m.

And what are they showing? The Film Society of Lincoln Center is in charge and has chosen Richard Peña as program director. (He also directs the New York Film Festival.) A monthly bulletin contains a full schedule along with articles describing the special programs of the month. The January schedule, for instance, interwove a series of fourteen films on the Depression, eleven films about Jewish life in Eastern Europe (including *Memoirs of a River*, reviewed here last week), twenty-two first films by great directors, the beginning of an Alain Tanner retrospective, five films by the noted contemporary Russian Alexander Sokurov, whose work has not been much shown in this country, and a Saturday afternoon program for children. And there's more.

Adventurous yet appreciatively retrospective, this is good programming. Of course, as with literary anthologies, everyone with an interest in the subject will disagree somewhat with the choices. (In my view, at least three of the people in the great directors series don't begin to belong there.) But every visit to the Walter Reade has had its rewards. In the Depression series, Capra's *American Madness* (1931) was preceded by three brief documentaries of the period—one of the Hunger March on Washington in 1932—that put the Capra film in a particularly searching light. In the Sokurov series, I saw *Mournful Indifference* (1983), his fantasy on Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. Since Shaw called his play "a fantasia in the Russian manner," it's fitting that a Russian should have fantasized about the fantasia. Sokurov used some newsreel clips of Shaw and also an actor made up as Shaw who chummed around with Captain Shotover in his nautical house. I've rarely seen a more heavy-handed fantasy; still it was interesting to those who care about both Shaw and film, and a cinematheque exists, among other purposes, to show such out-of-the-way films.

Good luck and long life to the Walter Reade. The number of "repertory" houses in New York has shrunk alarmingly. We still have, thank the cultural heavens, the Film Forum, the Museum of Modern Art film programs, the American Museum of the Moving Image, and some other resources, but there's no such thing as enough, and this new cinematheque is much more than just an addition to the group. It's of some national interest as well—possibly exemplary to other cities but certainly cheering in a dismal time for this country's artistic enterprise.

The lucky ones among us have seen Michael Apted's four documentaries, *7 Up*, *14 Up*, *21 Up*, and *28 Up*. Back in 1964 a British TV group commissioned Apted to make a documentary of interviews with English 7-year-olds. He chose fourteen children, made the film, then reinterviewed the subjects at seven-year intervals. (Only three people have declined to continue.) The biblical seven years are up again, and here is **35 Up** (Samuel Goldwyn), with, of course, plans for *42 Up*, etc.—or as etc. as possible.

The children selected, and subsequently followed, were of widely varied background, rich and middle and working class. (English class structure is a salient factor throughout.) Ten boys,

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Daughters of the Dust. *Julie Dash, writer and director, makes her impressive debut with this somewhat overly pretty account of a black family, 1902, migrating from the Sea Islands to the North. A genuine poetic talent underlies the easy poeticizing. (Reviewed 2/10/92)* **JFK.** *Oliver Stone's real rage is his belief that the assassination extended the Vietnam War. Factually rickety, but—or despite—very powerful filmmaking. (1/27/92)* **Memoirs of a River.** *Rural Hungary, 1882. The last Hungarian trial of Jews for ritual murder. Judit Elek directs movingly, though compression would have helped. (2/10/92)* **Prospero's Books.** *John Gielgud reads much of* The Tempest. *Reason enough to go. Peter Greenaway's visual accompaniment is irrelevant and gorgeous. (1/20/92)* **—SK**

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The Hamlet, N.C., Fire: A Postmortem

BY ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

When I was growing up, the Triangle fire was still vivid in people's memories. I often heard my mother, a garment worker and an ardent trade unionist, talk about how 150 workers, most of them young women, were killed in that fire. Many of them died struggling to escape through exit doors that were locked from the outside because the factory owners were afraid of workers' stealing the garments. Others were killed as they jumped from windows to get away from the flames. That fire was 80 years ago, and most people thought nothing like it could ever happen again. It was part of a bygone era before there were unions and health and safety laws to protect workers and inspectors to enforce the laws. But we were wrong—as we found out with the Imperial Food Products fire in Hamlet, N.C.

Last September 3, a fire broke out near the deep-fat fryer in Imperial's chicken-processing plant and spread quickly through the one-story building. The plant had no windows and no sprinkler or fire alarm system. And workers who got to the unmarked fire exits found some of them locked from the outside. Imperial's management was using the same "loss control" technique as the bosses at Triangle—and with the same results. Twenty-five of the 90-odd employees working at the time were killed, suffocated by the black smoke that filled the plant, and 55 more were injured.

Even good labor laws are no protection if the government doesn't hire people to enforce them.

What about the workplace health and safety laws that should have protected these workers? What about the inspectors? When states have budget crises and cut back on their services, few people are concerned if some state employees get laid off and some positions go unfilled. People tend to think of these employees as bureaucrats who are not doing anything much. They don't think that many of them provide crucial services—like inspecting workplaces to see if they are safe.

That was part of the problem in North Carolina. The state Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) had only 22 safety inspectors and 13 health inspectors—reduced from the 77 required by law. Imperial's chicken-processing plant should have been well up on their list anyway: It was one of 3,213 (out of 180,000) North Carolina workplaces in the "high hazard" category, and there had already been a fire there in 1984. But given the level of staffing and the work schedule at North Carolina OSHA, it would have taken the agency 30 years to check out all the "high hazard" workplaces. No one ever got around to inspecting the plant in Hamlet.

As for the union, North Carolina is a state whose right-to-work laws discourage unionization, so the workers at Imperial didn't have one. Of course, they could have complained anyway. But ask yourself how likely that was. The majority of Imperial's workers were poor women—and many were single mothers—who worked at or slightly above the minimum wage. Most of them probably had no idea that Imperial was breaking the law and that there was a government agency to which they could complain. But even if they had known, there are few jobs in Hamlet, and unemployment there is high. Employees knew the company would have no trouble replacing them if they made trouble. And how many would take a chance of losing the only job they were likely to get?

At the end of December 1991, the North Carolina Department of Labor hit Imperial Food Products with over $800,000 in civil fines, citing 54 "willful" safety violations, 23 "serious" violations, and 6 "other-than-serious" violations in the Hamlet plant. You can call this good news because it is the biggest fine for violations of this kind ever levied in North Carolina. On the other hand, it seems a ridiculously small fine for operating a plant under conditions that killed 25 people. Does it send a serious message to other companies that put their profits above the safety of their employees? Are workers in North Carolina's other nonunionized workplaces much safer now?

It's fashionable to say that unions aren't necessary anymore. They were important in the bad old days when individual workers were helpless and subject to exploitation by unscrupulous bosses. Nowadays, employers are said to be more enlightened. And if they aren't, a worker can take advantage of our enlightened labor laws to complain about working conditions that are unfair or dangerous. That sounds good, but the reality is not that simple.

Even good labor laws are no protection if the government can't afford to hire people to enforce them—or if the punishment meted out to offenders is little more than a reprimand. It's also true that even good laws are not self-enforcing. They won't work unless employees complain about infringements. But how many people would be willing to risk their jobs by calling an inspector to a workplace where there's no union? And, without the support of a union, how many are wealthy—or crazy—enough to challenge an employer to get their rights under the law?

My mother also used to say that some bosses were monsters but most were not. Bosses made their money by saving a penny here and a penny there. And if they ignored some safety precautions, that was often because the possibility of an accident seemed remote while the likelihood of making a profit was right there. That didn't make all bosses evil, she said, but it did mean that workers needed unions to protect their interests. Most workers still need that protection. The 80 years between the Triangle fire and the tragedy in Hamlet, N.C., have changed many things, but that's not one of them.

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one of them black, and four girls. I couldn't take these films seriously as sociological studies because the fourteen were chosen solely out of Apted's interest. Robert K. Merton and others in his field tell us that sociology is, basically, measuring, and if there is one thing these films are not, it is dispassionate, scientific measuring. They grow out of Apted's relationship with his subjects.

But that's quite enough. All the films are fascinating. Partly this is because the original choices were shrewd, partly because of Apted's questioning (we hear him, we never see him), and partly because of photography itself. It's the best stay we have against time, and with the motion-picture camera that fact becomes even more poignant. For each of his people in *35 Up*, Apted does a small, self-contained film: a collage of the person's previous appearances blended with much of the "present." Thus each inner film is like a bookkeeper's ledger of mortality—seven plus seven plus seven, and so on until it reaches thirty-five. Apted said of this new film: "What seems unique this time is the strong sense of mortality that pervades the film." For me, it pervaded them all except the first, and even then it was implied.

Apted himself now lives in Hollywood, where he has made such films as *Coal Miner's Daughter* and *Gorillas in the Mist*. He returns to England regularly to continue this project. He must be pleased that many of his people have turned out well. An upper-class boy who talked about becoming a missionary became a London schoolteacher instead and is now on special assignment in Bangladesh. A woman who was a very sniffy upper-class child and a very jaded 21-year-old is now happily married in the country, bright and humane. A Yorkshire farm boy who said he wanted to be an astronaut is now a professor of physics at the University of Wisconsin.

My own favorite is Tony, who was a tough little East End kid with an ambition to be a jockey. He is now an ex-jockey, a cabdriver, and an occasional film extra. (He's the one whom Apted questions most severely, about not having really made it as a jockey or in films. Tony says, "Better to be a has-been than a never-was.") He's happy with his sensible wife and adoring children. Like several of the others, Tony lost his mother in the seven-year interval, and he still misses her. "East Enders are all close to their mums," he says. It's all the more affecting because we've just had some glimpses of the scrappy urchin he once was.

But all of these people seem confidentially close. Seeing this film is like going to a reunion. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Melting the Concrete

The Royal National Theatre, that massive fortress that rose to dominate the South Bank of the Thames in 1976, has over the years turned into a curious anomaly. Jonathan Miller once dismissed Sir Denys Lasdun's highly visible building as a "concrete Colditz." Yet, despite its admittedly forbidding official architecture, the National has a warm, inviting interior, including comfortable public spaces, bars, restaurants, performance areas, and bookshops. The Theatre no longer supports a permanent acting company, as it did in the early Olivier years at the Old Vic. I managed to identify only one featured actor (Michael Bryant) appearing in more than one play. But although this kind of extravagance inflates the size of the budget, and deflates the pleasures of ensemble work, the National still runs as many as six or seven shows at any one time in three adjoining theaters. Perhaps the hardest task for an institution calling itself "National" is to be sufficiently representative of the nation as a whole—its admixture of classes, races, cultures, and tastes. In our country, this would be an impossible task. In England, whose character is still relatively homogeneous, the National continues to manage its mission with relative ease.

The National defines that mission as embracing a diverse repertoire, including classics, new plays, and neglected works from the whole of world drama. The five productions I visited during a recent trip were a fairly typical representation, except for the absence of Shakespeare (still the resident playwright of the RSC, a company presently performing at Stratford while the Barbican is shut for repairs). The National's new plays include Alan Bennett's **The Madness of George III** and David Hare's **Murmuring Judges**. The neglected work is Edward Bond's haunting **The Sea**. And the classics, both of them modern, are Brecht's **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui** and Garcia Lorca's **Blood Wedding**. Almost all of these productions are tolerable, and one is quite marvelous. But the impression is polyglot. Like the New York Public Theatre (the American institution it most resembles), the National is less a theater than a theater center, producing semi-autonomous shows in a number of different spaces. Like the Public, it gives an impression of variety and activity at the expense of a consistent style.

The most exhilarating production I saw on my trip was *The Madness of George III*, the most trying was a crude, poorly acted version of *Blood Wedding*, set in Cuba with a mostly black cast. (Yes, English theater also includes a dollop of multiculturalism from time to time.) Richard Eyre, the director of the National, is represented by his staging of the new Hare work, the second in a trilogy about England's social institutions. (The first, called *Racing Demon*, was a satire on the clergy.)

Performed in the Olivier Theatre, with its vast open stage, the production overwhelms a play whose legs were pretty wobbly to begin with. A cast of twenty-five actors plus multiple extras populate a number of locations, including the Inns of Court, the Old Bailey, the charge room of a police station, and a cavernous prison. Then, for the purpose of a single scene lasting less than five minutes, a car drives up (in a rainstorm!) to deliver spectators to a Covent Garden performance of *The Magic Flute*. (The opera house is suggested by a huge inner proscenium surrounded by bewigged and liveried footmen.) Hare's assault on the injustice of a money-besotted legal system is largely drowned in the maelstrom of a money-drenched production.

Despite its title (a Scottish phrase for contempt of court), *Murmuring Judges* is not so much a play about scandalized jurists as about the barristers and police officials who perpetuate a callously indifferent system. Using a "Hill Street Blues" format too banal to detail here, the action follows the trial on drug charges, imprisonment, and unsuccessful appeal of an innocent Irishman framed by a corrupt detective. The only person concerned enough to help him is a beautiful black female lawyer, who is joined in the climax by a policewoman sufficiently conscience-stricken to inform on her detective colleague. Hare continues to see the social world as a caucus of corrupt men exposed by idealistic women, and his writing technique (like much of the performance) is in that broad declarative style that American actors call "indicating."

"Indicating" also mars the National's

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production of *Arturo Ui* at the Olivier, where Antony Sher, following and echoing his performance as Richard III, plays Brecht's Führer-gangster in a manner both galvanic and boring. Scooting around the stage like a gorilla on stilts, he hurls himself into the part with abandon but never reaches much depth, like a high diver arcing gracefully into a two-foot pool. His impersonation of Hitler is essentially cosmetic—he's better at imitating Al Pacino—and the rest of the cast spends most of its energy trying to manage Chicago accents. Di Trevis's production of Ranjit Bolt's translation is also largely "indicated," underscoring parallels between the play and the Nazi period through slides, film, and program notes, as if the audience were in a state of total amnesia about the rudimentary facts of Third Reich history.

The program notes for *The Sea*, at the Lyttelton, consist entirely of Edward Bond's recent poetry, which is appropriate considering the reverberant poetic nature of the action. First performed in 1973 at the Royal Court (where it featured Ian Holm), the play has developed a rich underwater life over the years, as if encrusted with strange marine forms. This quality is fully realized in Sam Mendes's stark precisionist production, especially in Bob Crowley's stage design, a compound of windowed interiors and pebble-strewn exteriors, all dyed in hues of green that seem to immerse the characters and events in the chambers of the sea. It also features extraordinary lighting by Paul Pyant, who, with minimum effects, creates one of the most harrowing storms I've ever seen on stage.

The style of *The Sea* sometimes reminds one of the Yarmouth scenes in *David Copperfield*, sometimes of the undulant murmurous music of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, sometimes of *The Tempest*, and echoing those works, its theme is death by drowning. But the play is also uniquely Bond. No one else could have conceived the scene in which a draper, driven to fury by the capricious behavior of a customer, slices with his dangerous scissors into yards and yards of expensive material while inveighing against creatures from outer space. *The Sea* has a plot—the mortal conflict between an upper-class dowager (majestically played by Judi Dench) and the crazy alien-obsessed draper (a brilliant performance by Ken Stott)—and it ends with one of Bond's customary appeals to action ("I told you this so you wouldn't despair, but you must change the world"). It's true richness, however, lies not in revolutionary politics but in mystical metaphors and bizarre shifts of mood. You absorb it subliminally, like the roaring of distant waves.

Nothing in Bennett's career as a wit and social satirist could have prepared us for the authority and maturity he displays in *The Madness of George III* (Lyttelton). The play signals the arrival of an important epic playwright. On the surface, the work is an effort to redeem, mostly on the basis of recent medical evidence, a much-maligned historical figure from his traditional characterization as a tyrant, buffoon, and madman. George, it seems, was not mad, as he alone believed, but suffering from porphyria, a disease characterized by symptoms of madness (and also by purple urine, hence its name). To settle for another clinical explanation of George's condition, however, is to fall into the same snare that Bennett satirizes so brilliantly throughout the play, namely the belief that curing the malady is less important than naming it properly. One of George's doctors ascribes the king's disease to "flying gout" or "rheumatism in the head"; another to his stool; another to his arrogant spirit—and each prescribes another ghastly method of treatment, whether purges, bleeding, blistering, straitjackets, or "a good spew and a good sweat." I doubt if the new nomenclature will result in any better treatment, much less a cure.

Bennett's satire on benighted medical practices reminds me of *The Doctor's*

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Dilemma (and of Shaw's Dr. Walpole, whose universal cure is to "stimulate the phagocytes"). But the uniqueness of his play lies in the way it manages to evoke an entire historical epoch. The action begins with four red-coated equerries walking backward down a set of golden stairs (an eloquent design by Mark Thompson), followed by magnificently dressed courtiers entering upon the stage to Handel's brilliant *Royal Fireworks* music.

Before long we are deep in the intrigues of Georgian politics, represented by the opposition of two Whig parties: those serving the king (led by the younger William Pitt), and those seeking to displace them (led by Charles Fox). The Fox party hopes to replace George with his son, the Prince of Wales, a fat ignoramus with a weakness for furniture. (Michael Fitzgerald plays the part as if he had just stepped out of a Gillray caricature.) In this seedy atmosphere of power politics, George's growing dementia becomes a sacrifice to human ambition as the various politicians propose their own doctors and remedies in an effort to ensure that the king will never recover.

George himself—in a stunning performance by Nigel Hawthorne—is depicted as a simple, uxorious man with a passion for farming who disintegrates before our eyes from a robust and wily Hanoverian (who adds "What, what?" to every declaration) into a tormented, slovenly, Lear-like figure afflicted with colic, sweats, running sores, and pains in the legs ("my blood is full of cramps—lobsters cramp my bones—my limbs are laced with fire"). Eventually, a physician suggested by Lady Pembroke seems to alleviate his agony through a torture of his own devising; his primitive mental therapy consists of breaking down the king's spirit. But it is more likely that the disease just runs its course. At any rate, the king is eventually, if temporarily, restored to sanity, with the capacity to name his own children, though not to name the lost colonies (he still splutters over the word "America"). Told that he now seems more like himself, he replies, "I have always been myself—I have just learned how to *seem*. What, what?" The "what, what?"—and the appearance of yellow urine—signal the restoration of sanity, and, only mildly shaken by reports of "minor disturbances in Paris," he returns to the task of ruling his kingdom.

Actually, George's affliction returned to plague him for the last twenty years of his life, removing him from the throne and giving the corpulent Regent a long-deferred opportunity to indulge his infatuation with (regency) furniture. But the final ascent of the court up those golden stairs to Handel's shimmering trumpets describes a circle of English history as well as anything to be found in modern theater. The entire company is superb, and Nicholas Hytner's flawlessly orchestrated production brings the National Theatre to a splendid fulfillment of its theatrical mission. •

The View from Somewhere

BY MICHAEL WALZER

Equality and Partiality by Thomas Nagel

(Oxford University Press, 186 pp., $17.95)

Thomas Nagel is one of the most interesting American philosophers. He is highly intelligent, sharply analytical, thoroughly clearheaded. But in all this he does not differ greatly from many other members of the philosophic profession. His great strength, and much of his originality, lie in his anxiety. He is a wonderful worrier, even if he sometimes worries at a fairly high level of abstraction. Though he believes in the intellectual and moral authority of philosophical argument, his own arguments are more disturbing than they are authoritative. The moral world that he describes is virtually constituted by its contradictions; and it seems that the best philosopher-guides can do little more than explore its quandaries. Nagel's finest moments come in the course of such explorations, when he brings us to an impasse—and stops, and turns, and frets.

Equality and Partiality is a political sequel to Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* (1986), a much acclaimed examination of the problem of objectivity in science, in ethics, in mental life generally. In his new book, Nagel turns to the political realm as the place where the view from nowhere comes most dramatically into conflict with the view from somewhere, where objectivity is often overwhelmed by self-interest. This, he insists, is an internal conflict, a feature of the individual's moral life, even if it is sometimes externalized as a conflict between society and the self. On the one hand, we are all capable of stepping back and taking up the view from nowhere, an impersonal perspective from which we see the same things and reach universal conclusions. On the other hand, we stand where we stand, see what we see from there, and reach personal and parochial conclusions. Political argument is shaped, even dominated, by the tension of impersonal and personal views.

The impersonal view makes not only for universality, but also for equality. We "remove ourselves in thought from our particular position in the world and think simply of all those people, without singling out as *I* the one we happen to be." From this perspective, we see that everyone's life matters in exactly the same way; no one's life matters more than anyone else's; and we are driven by the logic of impersonality to an egalitarian moral and political position. Paradoxically, this means that all the men and women in the world have an equal right to live their lives in accordance with their own interests and values, as these are understood from the personal perspective. Thus the view from nowhere validates all the views from somewhere.

These multiple views, however, are not egalitarian. They are self-absorbed, self-interested, often simply selfish. The central problem of political life is to achieve "some form of reasonable integration" between our understanding of the moral need for equality and the equally moral rights of partiality. We require, Nagel says, political institutions that "do justice to the equal importance of all persons without making unacceptable demands on individuals."

The conflict between these two aims is most easily illustrated in economic terms (and Nagel's book is focused much of the time on questions of socioeconomic justice). If everyone's life matters equally, then resources should be distributed equally to each of us—or at least with such sufficiency as will make for equal, or roughly equal, life chances. But resources have already been distributed, unequally, and those of us with more are not at all eager to surrender part of what we have to those with less. We are occupied with our own plans, hopes, habits, and commitments. Even if I recognize that everyone else's life, when viewed from nowhere, matters as

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much as my own life, my own life matters more to me, standing here, where I am.

Both these perspectives, Nagel insists, are morally legitimate. Recognizing the fact that people have personal motivations is not a "capitulation to human badness or weakness but a necessary acknowledgment of human complexity." That said, however, he would clearly prefer that we were less complex. If people were able to "submerge" some of their personal motivations, sustain for longer periods of time the impersonal perspective, commit themselves (though never exclusively) to everyone's equal importance and hence to the common good, they would be "better" people. But this seems to him an unlikely prospect, except at the margins. Hence his book consists of a series of philosophically subtle descriptions and redescriptions of what impartial justice requires and a series of brutally pessimistic denials that these requirements can ever be met.

We must never give up the view from nowhere, the source of our moral idealism, but we can never live exclusively or predominantly in accordance with the way things look from there. "A strongly egalitarian society populated by reasonably normal people is difficult to imagine and in any case psychologically and politically out of reach." It is psychologically out of reach because personal motives (such as material acquisitiveness) are indispensable if socioeconomic activity is to be free, efficient, and successful; and these motives are compatible at best with a very limited egalitarianism—a minimal welfare state, perhaps. And it is politically out of reach because the repression of these motives can only be achieved by an authoritarian regime, where power itself is unequally distributed; while a democratic regime must allow full and equal scope to all persons and to all personal motivations.

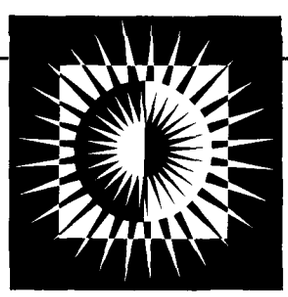
"Democracy," Nagel says, "is the enemy of comprehensive equality." He means, I think, that political equality is the enemy of economic equality: the kind of sacrifices necessary to bring the worst-off groups to the level of the better-off, and so to achieve what used to be called a classless society, will never command sufficient popular support. And though such sacrifices are morally desirable, the refusal to make them—this is the authentic Nagelian message—is not morally illegitimate. We have rights not to every penny in our possession, but to the resources that we need to shape a life of our own in accordance with our own values.

This argument is pursued with a grim zest. And it clearly makes moral sense, as well as psychological and political sense, given Nagel's universalism. Consider a simple case: an ordinary American family, mother, father, and a couple of children, with middling income and no inherited wealth, struggling to escape cramped quarters and find an affordable apartment or house in which each child can have a room of his or her own. The necessary money would certainly relieve much greater human pain if it were taxed by some global authority and sent, say, to Bangladesh. The view from nowhere would enjoin such a transfer—but it would also, at the same time, recognize the legitimacy of the familial project.

And so there is an impasse. Neither in theory nor in practice is there any way out, though this is not to say that the appalling inequalities of the contemporary world cannot be reduced to some degree. Just as family love is compatible with anti-nepotism laws, so all personal motives can be constrained. Since the conflict is internal and all of us feel the pull of impersonal motives, we can be brought to accept small sacrifices for the sake of a larger, more general good. And so we will allow our government to send, say, humanitarian aid to Bangladesh. Nagel does not disdain such minor victories. He wants only to argue that much more is morally required, and that nothing more can reasonably be expected.

The familial example, however, points to a feature of Nagel's argument that puts this pessimism in a new light. Fathers and mothers often make sacrifices for the sake of their children. So, Nagel admits, do the members of "close-knit communities of exceptional solidarity" for the sake of fellow members. But this seemingly moral behavior is "probably produced by racial or religious kinship rather than the motive of impartiality." In Nagel's eyes, looking on from nowhere, such sacrifices don't count, since they don't represent a "submergence" of personal motivation. Concern for family, friends, comrades, fellow members of this or that group, even fellow citizens: all this is "personal" and only gets in the way of "an impartial regard for humanity."

Only in the very last pages of his book does Nagel acknowledge that the different kinds of parochial solidarities—all of which he finds (apparently from both the personal and impersonal points of view) "distasteful"—serve in fact as "a powerful source of political allegiance to institutions which deal equitably with members of the group." Alas, only with members of the group, not with everyone in the world; and so this last minute discovery of a moral "source" unrecog-



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nized and untapped throughout the book leads to no reassessment of the book's argument. But it should lead Nagel's readers to think again about his radical dichotomy.

The actual moral conflicts that most people live with are not between self-concern and universal impartiality. Indeed, this latter perspective makes few claims on us or, better, few concrete and urgent claims that challenge our private hopes and plans. The important challenges come from what might be called the extended versions of self-concern, where what concerns me is the set of other people to whom I am related or committed or obligated—and, in all these cases, to some degree, emotionally bound. I have to choose, as in Sartre's famous example, between my own project and my mother's well-being, or between private spending and higher school taxes, or between personal safety and the needs of a movement or political community in trouble.

These are conflicts that test—what? The extent of my impartiality or the intensity of my solidarity and partisanship? The description doesn't matter. It is my commitment to particular other people, the experience of working with them on common projects or for the sake of a common life, that lifts me out of myself. In fact, these local commitments meet some of the requirements of Nagelian impartiality. They aren't merely emotional; they entail a recognition of other people's needs, and such a recognition is likely to be generalized from my own needs, since I don't actually know most of the others. At the same time, the acknowledgment that I am *responsible* for the others has a "personal" motive: they are, let's say, my fellow citizens.

Nagel seems to think that we act morally only when our motive is radically impersonal, when we pursue what he calls "agent-neutral" values. Since he has little faith in this motive, and since he recognizes the legitimacy of other motives, assumed to be "agent-relative," focused on the self, he is led into his impasse. He hopes, at best, for a moral division of labor, where impartial regard will be achieved politically, through institutional arrangements and practices, "leaving us relatively free to pursue agent-relative values in our personal lives." But he is pessimistic, again, about persuading enough people to support the right kinds of arrangements and practices. It would be foolish, I suppose, to be optimistic—especially given this way of formulating the problem. We need to attend to the middle terms between the personal and the impersonal: to groups, communities, nations, and cultures.

Rousseau writes caustically about people who love humanity but don't care very much about their neighbors. Nagel's pessimism is focused instead on people who love their neighbors but don't care very much about humanity. He seems to think that there are more than enough people of this latter sort, but in fact there are nowhere near enough. And the prospect of finding people who are willing to attend to the needs of their neighbors, indeed, the political and moral importance of finding them, presses us in a direction that Nagel does not explore.

Consider, for example, John Stuart Mill's argument that men and women in modern commercial societies are bound to be self-absorbed, their attention and interest fastened exclusively upon themselves, unless they are drawn into a culture of citizenship and patriotism and a life of public activity. Only the citizen can be "made to feel that, besides the interests which separate him from his fellow citizens, he has interests which connect him with them." Making these connections, he expands his "personal" perspective, without ever quite attaining a universal impartiality. But this expansion, were it ever widely achieved, would make possible far more egalitarian socioeconomic policies than any we are likely to see in the United States today. This kind of egalitarianism still has limits, for at some juncture it requires sacrifices that most men and women will refuse, insisting on the legitimacy of their self-concern and their personal projects. But at this point the impersonal perspective is hardly in the competition. What competes with self-concern is one or another particular commitment.

If we want more egalitarian societies, we will have to draw on commitments of that sort. Actually Nagel does this, without ever quite acknowledging what he is doing, for his more concrete discussions of socioeconomic issues deal mostly with particular states and societies. In principle, the view from nowhere encompasses all humanity, global society. In practice, most of the time, even for Nagel, what is at issue is an "impartial benevolence for all the other members *of the community*" (my emphasis). Impartiality doesn't reach much beyond our fellow citizens, though it is a necessary feature of the fellowship. Universalism, one might say, is always limited in its applications.

But then, surely, we need to know what the nature of our fellowship is, what sort of history it has, and what practices have become conventional within it. Here at home, partiality and equality are not the opposing terms that Nagel suggests: in any given community, greater partiality for fellow members makes for greater equality. There is, no doubt, a price to be paid for this equality, and it is a lack of concern for nonmembers. Here there are genuine and difficult moral issues on which Nagel's anxiety is usefully focused. But we have to worry, so to speak, in both directions. What price would we pay in our local communities for universal impartiality? What hope would there be for fellowship and equality then? •

Up from Hell

BY ELIZABETH BECKER

The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution Since 1945 by David P. Chandler

(Yale University Press, 416 pp., $35)

In the past few months Cambodia has lived through its own version of accelerated history. The crumbling of the Soviet Union not only freed it from the designs of Vietnam, but also shamed the Western world into giving up the ghost of the cold war in its deliberations over Cambodia's fate. The result, after two years of negotiations, is a peace plan that has brought Cambodia back into the real world.

In October Cambodians and their foreign patrons signed the country's first peace treaty in twenty-one years. Soon afterward Western diplomatic and aid missions, which had stayed away for the past sixteen years, returned to Phnom Penh. The four armies of Hun Sen (the prime minister of the Phnom Penh government originally installed by Vietnam), Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Son Sann (the former non-Communist prime minister), and Pol Pot (the leader

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of the Khmer Rouge) respected a cease-fire, more or less. The ferocious embargoes and sanctions imposed against Cambodia by the West were lifted. And blue-helmeted soldiers arrived to begin a United Nations program to oversee the country's transition from its current state of decay and near-chaos to a functioning Asian-style democracy within three years.

As Cambodia came back to life, it displayed, as always, a touch of the surreal: returning from twelve years of exile, Sihanouk paraded through the streets of Phnom Penh in a 1963 Impala convertible. But immediately he declared from the balcony of the royal palace that he finally supported bringing the Khmer Rouge to trial on charges of genocide. It wasn't long before one of those Khmer Rouge leaders arrived in the capital as part of the peace plan, and a crowd nearly lynched him; other crowds, emboldened by such heady demonstrations of open political discontent, marched on the home of a particularly corrupt government minister and forced him out of power.

Suddenly foreign analysts and diplomats began worrying that these messy, unpredicted events would kill the "fragile peace." Yet there is another way, of course, to look at these unscripted confrontations. It is to recognize that the Cambodian people have retained their sense of decency and dissent after two decades of horror, and to applaud them for it. About one thing, certainly, there can be no doubt: people who have suffered through the likes of the Cambodian civil war, the Khmer Rouge holocaust, the Vietnamese occupation, and the manipulation of these trials by both sides in the cold war are bound to have a hard time in their transformation from victims and killers into calm, ordinary citizens. Each week, however, brings new hope. Amnesty International has made its first official visit to the country, and soon thereafter Cambodia's first independent human rights organization was formed. A new independent political party announced its birth in January.

A new civilian identity, in short, is growing in Cambodia. Even some of the most skeptical of the relief workers in Phnom Penh have been pleasantly surprised by the U.N.'s use of the flexible peace plan to reshape priorities. The first modification was to enlarge the demining program, making it a top priority. Rather than waiting some six months, as envisaged in the original plan, the U.N. has authorized sending a 1,090-member team to Cambodia to begin immediately clearing the estimated 6 million bombs planted around the country.

In a mere few months, the peace accord has begun to change the country. But an obstacle to its success has arisen in an entirely unexpected place. In a lofty and well-meaning gesture that could undercut all of these early accomplishments, the U.S. Congress is threatening to reject the administration's request for $700 million to fund America's sizable and perfectly justifiable contribution to the plan. The $700 million, required over two years, is already in the budget; it would not increase the deficit, and it only requires congressional approval. But in late November and early December a majority of senators (fifty-five) and representatives (247) signed letters to President Bush threatening to block funds for the Cambodian peace plan because the international community has allowed the Khmer Rouge a role in postwar Cambodia.

This is a particularly unfortunate instance of righteousness on the Hill, a case of Congress being more Cambodian than the Cambodians. Senators as different as George Mitchell and Jesse Helms attacked the Bush administration for conferring "political and moral legitimacy upon the Khmer Rouge" and for crafting a plan that "relies too heavily upon Khmer Rouge cooperation for its success." There is no mention at all of any of the positive aspects of the plan. From the Hill's letters to the White House, one would think that the whole point of the negotiations was to appease the Khmer Rouge. That, of course, is the cynic's view; but in the same spirit, one might inquire of the letter's signers whether they are worried less about the fate of Cambodia and more about the fate of their forthcoming campaigns, in which they may be charged with spending too much money on foreign aid.

The House and Senate letters contained the same threat: "It will be difficult to sustain congressional support for the most costly United Nations peacekeeping operation in history unless there is confidence that the process will not assist the Khmer Rouge." One might as well demand that the history of Cambodia be rewritten. For if the Khmer Rouge is a part of the peace plan, it is not least because President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, was given carte blanche by a Democratic-controlled Congress in 1979 to make a deal with China and Thailand to rebuild the Khmer Rouge, in order to prevent Vietnam from permanently occupying Cambodia. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, told me how this was done: "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. I encouraged

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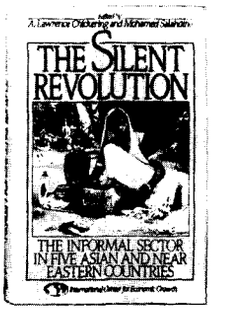

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the Thais to help." The United States made sure that the Khmer Rouge government retained Cambodia's seat at the United Nations while, as Brzezinski said, Washington "winked semipublicly" at China and Thailand as they gave the Khmer Rouge direct aid.

The Carter administration refused to adopt a neutral position opposing both the Vietnamese occupation government and the Khmer Rouge government. And the subsequent Republican administrations of Reagan and Bush honored the policy that they inherited, and made sure that America's allies respected America's sanctions against the shattered country so long as the Vietnamese controlled it. In 1981, when the U.N. held the first peace conference on Cambodia, the United States, its Congress included, did not protest when members of the Khmer Rouge were the only Cambodians invited as full participants, even though the U.N. Human Rights Commission had declared that there was irrefutable evidence that the Khmer Rouge committed genocide during its rule between 1975 and 1979. From 1979 until 1988 Washington rejected any talk of bringing the Khmer Rouge to trial. Its thinking was entirely geostrategic, and its pre-eminent goal was to get Vietnam out of Cambodia. This was nothing new. As David P. Chandler confirms in his new book, American policy toward Cambodia during the Vietnam War period was also essentially "linked to the destiny of South Vietnam."

It was on Bush's watch, in 1989, that the Vietnamese withdrew their troops, and the implications of American policy finally sunk in. The French sponsored a conference to get the warring parties to agree on a settlement before the Vietnamese withdrawal, but their efforts failed. The Paris Conference in the summer of 1989 had the consequence of convincing Congress that the Khmer Rouge could become a threat again. Critics like Chet Atkins in the House and George Mitchell in the Senate successfully raised the Khmer Rouge issue, and the Bush administration, prodded by the media, responded. Secretary of State James Baker initiated negotiations among the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and finally dropped American support for the retention of Cambodia's seat at the U.N. by the Khmer Rouge coalition government.

Atkins deserves credit for pressuring the Bush administration about the Khmer Rouge. He could now easily declare victory and go home. Instead, having made matters a little better, he threatens to make them much worse. He recently complained to *The New York Times* that "one single clear and continuing theme in United States policy to Cambodia has been our insistence on the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the interim government." But this is exactly wrong. The whole point of the settlement is that the Khmer Rouge is *not* part of an interim government.

The major powers worked for two years on this plan. The final settlement was authored by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and refined by the four Cambodian factions at war—the Phnom Penh government, the resistance forces of Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann, and the Khmer Rouge. Australia and Japan pushed the settlement along. The U.N. Secretariat helped to draft the final accords. Until a new government is elected, the plan calls for the U.N. to oversee the existing government in Phnom Penh, which has been ruling the country since 1979, first as a Communist state under the Vietnamese occupation, and since 1989 on its own. (This survivor's regime has fought the Khmer Rouge since 1979.) At least 75 percent of each army will be demobilized. A separate Supreme National

Apostrophe
(In Memory of Donald Barthelme, 1931-1989)

Perpetual worrier, patron of the misfit
and misguided, the oddball, the longshot,
irreverent black sheep in every family,
middle-aged man who languishes on the couch
with his head in his hands and often
spends the evening drinking by himself,
a dualist fated to deal in hybrids and cross-
breedings, riddles without answers, slumgullions,
impure waters, inappropriate longings, philosopher
of acedia, of spiritual torpor, nightsweats
and free-floating anxieties, sentencings,
sullenness in the face of existence, wry veteran
of the unresolved and the self-divided,
the besotted, the much married, defender
of the unhealthy and the uncommitted,
collagist of that mysterious overcrowded muck
we called a city, master of the solo riff
and the non sequitur, the call and response,
voiceovers and back-trackings, sublime bewilderments
and inexplicabilities, the comedy of post-
historical desires and thwarted passions,
first of the non-joiners, most unlikely,
tactful, and generous of fathers, you
who embarrassed the credulous and irritated
the unimaginative, who entertained the void
and recycled the dross, who deflated
the pretentious and deepened perplexities,
subject to odd stabbing rages of happiness,
weird bouts of pleasure, connoisseur of mornings,
of sunlight swinging into an open doorway,
small boys bumping into small girls, purposefully,
most self-conscious and ecstatic of ironists
who sang uncertainties like the Song of Songs
and dwelled in doubt like a habitation,
my wary, unreachable, inconsolable friend,
I wish I believed in another world than this
so I could think of seeing you again
raising your wineglass to the Holy Ghost,
your "main man," and praising the mysteries,
Love and Work, looking down at the weather
which, as you said, is going to be fair
and warmer, warmer and fair, most fair.

EDWARD HIRSCH

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Council, not a government but a consultative body made up of representatives of all four factions, will advise the U.N. on whether the accords are being implemented fairly. This council also represents the sovereignty of the country and holds the Cambodian seat at the U.N. The Khmer Rouge holds only two of the twelve seats on that body. Again, it is not a part of the government.

The peace plan is an expensive but exciting experiment. For the first time, the international community has agreed not only to monitor peacekeeping and elections, but also to oversee the rebuilding of a country from the bottom up. To emphasize that commitment, Japan was put in charge of reconstruction within the plan, and the Japanese government on its own is arranging an international conference on how best to rebuild a country that lost its entire infrastructure through war, revolution, and international sanctions.

It was one of the most important achievements of the accord that the United States, France, and Great Britain persuaded China to back down from its ironclad demand that the Khmer Rouge return to Phnom Penh as an equal partner in a coalition government. This was no mean feat, as Chandler's account of China's cynical role in Cambodia shows. And this marked an essential reversal of our own Cambodian policy, too. For Carter's original policy was worse even than Atkins portrayed it: the logical extension of the American argument at the U.N. that the Khmer Rouge government was the sole, legitimate authority of Cambodia should surely have been the reinstatement of Pol Pot's government once the Vietnamese withdrew, just as the Emir of Kuwait was reinstated after the Iraqis withdrew.

Certainly the most egregious error of the congressional letters is their implication that by supporting the funding of the plan, one supports the return of the Khmer Rouge. As Joel Charney of Oxfam America said, "Of course I'm appalled that Khieu Samphan and Son Sen [Khmer Rouge leaders] are walking around Phnom Penh. But we have to work with this plan. I'd rather see Atkins monitoring the U.S. AID program than holding the whole peace plan hostage." Charney has been lobbying since 1979 to get the international community back into Cambodia to rebuild the country; for him, the peace accord has already achieved the major goal of simply getting the United States and the West back to Phnom Penh. Similarly, the head of an American relief organization that has been in Cambodia since 1979 said that while he, too, was afraid that the Khmer Rouge could undermine the plan by means of its participation in the Supreme National Council, "it is my sense this is not happening. The U.N. is not letting that happen."

PRINCE SIHANOUK BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

David Hawk of the Cambodia Documentation Commission, who has worked full time over the last decade to bring the Khmer Rouge to trial, is also mystified by the congressional complaint that the Khmer Rouge is being let off the hook under this agreement. Hawk saw it as a victory when Baker and officials from Great Britain and Australia announced their support for a national tribunal for the Khmer Rouge criminals: "Baker found his voice in 1991 and made additions up to the last minute on the plan that obligate Cambodia to try the Khmer Rouge, at least on paper." But now Congress is demanding that the Khmer Rouge be tried before an international, rather than a national, court. "However well motivated, that appeal has not been thought through," said Hawk. "Politics apart, the legal, diplomatic, and moral situation has changed in 1991. It is now much more difficult to properly get at the responsible Khmer Rouge leaders. To link the implementation of the U.N. peace plan to an international tribunal that just won't happen will hurt Cambodia."

To be sure, the aid groups have their own list of conditions they would like attached to American funding: to build on Cambodian institutions and not replace them with international bureaucrats; to begin immediate long-term help for farmers; to provide better protection for the refugees as they return home; to implement fully the human rights agreements and ensure that the Thai army ends all support of the Khmer Rouge. Still, "the bottom line is that the U.S. has to fund the plan," said Donal Parks of the Indochina Project, which has been criticizing American policy toward Cambodia for more than a decade. "We think the U.S., including Congress, has a moral obligation to carry through on our end of the bargain. You make a deal and you stick to it."

It would have been much easier for the world to walk away from the wreckage of Cambodia. One reason that Cambodia was not abandoned by the international community was public pressure in the United States, France, Great Britain, and Japan. Journalists, writers, relief organizations, a few politicians, old peace groups and new human rights organizations, and the movie *The Killing Fields* have all tried to educate the world about Cambodia, to create a sense of collective responsibility. Their efforts will be rewarded, if Congress does not block the funds, with the international community

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spending $3 billion to rebuild an otherwise unimportant devastated country. But now, for better or worse, Cambodia's future is once again in the hands of politicians in Washington. And Cambodians are understandably nervous, given America's special role in creating disasters in their country.

Since *The Killing Fields* is the likely source of most people's knowledge of Cambodia, the easiest way to explain the anxiety that Cambodians feel about Washington today is to recall one of the chief themes of that film: that part of the road to the Khmer Rouge hell was paved with good American intentions. The film's hero is a *New York Times* reporter who spends the first part of the movie railing against the corruption of the Phnom Penh regime, which is supported by a callous and cynical American government; American warplanes bomb the countryside, create more and more refugees, and fuel the reporter's anger. All of this is true—and yet the reporter fails to understand the whole story. For him, the American war machine and the government that it props up are the only bad guys.

Midway through the movie, the Phnom Penh government totters toward collapse and American support is withdrawn. The film lingers over the scene of the American ambassador fleeing in a helicopter. In real life, however, the withdrawal of American support was facilitated by Congress, which cut back American aid to the Phnom Penh regime. In Washington's world of checks and balances, this seemed like a proper expression of unhappiness with the Nixon administration's failed policy. It was also argued that a cut-off of war supplies would bring peace more swiftly to Cambodia and relieve the long suffering of its people. (Chandler adds that in 1975 the United States changed its mind and at the last minute was "willing to negotiate to avoid a humiliating defeat," but the Communists refused.)

In Cambodia, however, this high-minded congressional act was seen as a final betrayal. Prince Sirik Matak, a former leader of the doomed government, expressed his bitterness in a letter to the departing American ambassador: "I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which have chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection and we can do nothing about it.... I have only committed this mistake of believing in you [the United States]."

The film depicts the fate of Prince Sirik Matak, though this sudden complication requires a stark switch in bad guys and catches the reporter-hero and the audience largely unprepared. For until that moment he has paid remarkably little attention to the soldiers whom America's corrupt allies are trying to defeat. But those are the soldiers who won; and they turn out to be the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot and his army order all Cambodians out of Phnom Penh into rural labor camps, and tell the remaining foreigners, including the *Times* reporter, that the price of their safe conduct out of the country will be to hand over the Cambodians they are protecting. Sirik Matak was one of those Cambodians; he was told to leave the compound and was placed in the hands of the Khmer Rouge. What the film fails to show is the doomed prince walking down to the Cercle Sportif club a few blocks away and being beheaded on the club's tennis courts.

"What is a game for outside powers entranced by their perceptions of the Cambodian problem is a continuing disaster for ... Cambodians." This observation, with which Chandler's fine book ends, goes to the heart of the current fiasco. Chandler could have been speaking for the figure he understands the best, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The prince has denounced Congress's threat to withhold money for the peace plan. He has insisted that this could be "very dangerous" for Cambodia, and suggested that the members of Congress misunderstand the settlement.

An American academic who teaches in Australia—he has been the dean of Cambodian studies for years—Chandler has compiled the rich research done by others and added to it his own interviews and research, particularly in the archives of the French government. He confirms and expands upon the three great themes of modern Cambodian history: its unfortunate geography, squeezed between ambitious Thailand and rapacious Vietnam; the dictatorial style of its leaders, including the god-king Sihanouk, who was overthrown in 1970, the hapless military figure Lon Nol, who lost the war in 1975, and the ultimate Communist Pol Pot; and the country's sense of its past glory, symbolized most spectacularly by the towers of Angkor. Unfortunately Chandler concludes his chronicle in 1979, which is precisely the point at which the subject is most sorely in need of study.

The study of this subject, of course, arouses unusually strong passions. Not least among the challenges facing the historian of contemporary Cambodia is to navigate the many agonizing debates and find some objectivity. At times, however, Chandler reaches too far for balance: a recent *New York Times* review rightly chastised him for declaring on his very first page that 1 million Cambodians died during the Khmer Rouge holocaust, and then adding: "Most of these deaths, however, were never intended by [the Khmer Rouge government]." But the strengths of his instructive (though not exactly riveting) book lie in its discussion not of Communist Cambodia, but of the years that preceded the Communist takeover. Chandler has organized his material with textbook precision. He ably fleshes out the historical events and skillfully dissects the byzantine Cambodian world as it clashed with the contending powers of the cold war. His portrait of Sihanouk in particular helps to explain the prince's behavior as he continues to baffle the outside world but nonetheless remains the rallying point for his country.

In criticizing the critics of the peace plan, I do not mean to suggest that Congress, or the U.N., or the international community, or the Cambodians themselves should slacken their vigilance about the Khmer Rouge. Quite the contrary. Two questions must be asked indefatigably about Pol Pot and his armed movement: Does it still pose a danger to Cambodia? And can it be brought to justice?

The answers to these questions, however, give some ground for reassurance. For a start, the peace plan weakens Pol Pot significantly: it robs him of the support of China and Thailand, and it disarms and demobilizes three-fourths of his army. Even taking into account the likely concealment of some of Pol Pot's troops, the plan denies the Khmer Rouge a chance to take over the country by force in the near future, if not forever.

Of course, the Khmer Rouge can compete in the elections. And this is an appropriate point of concern. The CIA, for instance, has been predicting a Khmer Rouge military victory since the Vietnamese withdrew in 1989 and left the Phnom Penh government to defend itself. Indeed, the Khmer Rouge bragged that it would control three Cambodian provinces within three months after the Vietnamese withdrawal, and that it would soon thereafter take over the whole country.

At the time of the signing of the peace accords in 1991, however, the Khmer Rouge had failed to capture a single city, much less a single province. The CIA analysts counter that the Khmer Rouge has simply changed its tactics, that it is busy preparing for free elections in which, these analysts say, it could win as much as 40 percent of the

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vote. But this amounts to crediting the Khmer Rouge's own rationalization of its defeat. It was the military failure of the Khmer Rouge, after all, that helped to convince the Chinese to compromise on Cambodia. And it was the people's failure to support the Khmer Rouge that contributed to Pol Pot's inability to take over the country. After going back and forth to Cambodia as a reporter for nearly twenty years, there is one thing of which I am certain: that the Cambodians, after these decades of inhumanity, do not want another Communist regime.

Indeed the peace plan could effectively call the Khmer Rouge's bluff. Mary Kay Magistad reports on Cambodia for National Public Radio and has made a dozen trips around the Cambodian countryside since the Vietnamese withdrew, and she reports that she has yet to run across the large strongholds of support for the Khmer Rouge that are said to exist. "The Khmer Rouge are still active but more in small isolated groups," she concluded. "They are best at terrorizing the population, not at winning hearts and minds as they want you to believe."

Underlying most of the fears about the Khmer Rouge is the conviction that China holds the cards to Cambodia's future. I would argue that Japan will be the more important influence. One of the first acts of the new U.N. secretary general, Boutros Ghali, was to appoint Yasushi Akashi as the head of the U.N. team in Cambodia. The respected undersecretary general for disarmament affairs at the U.N., Akashi was the first Japanese employed by the U.N., back in 1957. He is a special favorite of Sihanouk, who made known his preference for Akashi's appointment.

It is fitting that a Japanese will head the U.N. mission in Cambodia. After what Cambodia suffered under Communist and American patronage during the cold war, modern Japan is an inviting new patron, despite the ghost of its old East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which subjugated Southeast Asia during World War II. The Japanese are leading the industrial boom in the Pacific and opening up Indochina, despite America's wish to continue international sanctions against Vietnam. Japan's prominence in the region should become even more obvious this year. In January Japan lifted its own aid restrictions against Vietnam in acknowledgment of the peace reached in Cambodia. Japan is already Vietnam's largest trading partner; this year it could become one of Vietnam's most important aid donors. With Cambodia and Vietnam at peace and developing their economies, the Southeast Asian region would be secure for Japanese investment.

It would be foolhardy to predict what Cambodia will look like in five years, but it can be pretty confidently stated, I think, that the threat from Communist China has peaked. Cambodia was a victim of twentieth-century ideological warfare, which in Asia was waged in the shadow of China. China and Vietnam remain strong members of the dying Communist world, but it is Japan that is setting the tone in Asia for the twenty-first century's economic contests. It is most likely that Cambodia will follow the pattern of its neighbors in Southeast Asia, eventually becoming a mercantile state with, one hopes, a stronger sense of the importance of human rights.

Once Cambodians become accustomed to a somewhat open society, to a better standard of living, to travel, to foreign people and trade, to the full expression of their culture, it will be extremely difficult to imagine how the Khmer Rouge will hold much appeal. In such a situation, the Khmer Rouge may go the way of the Malaysian Communist Party, the mainland Kuomintang, and the Thai Communist Party: into oblivion or the narcotics trade.

This appears to be the direction in which history is tugging Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leadership must leave the scene soon, preferably under custody or in coffins; and the prospect of a trial, as embodied in the peace accords, may convince some of its leaders to take early retirement in Beijing. The international community will certainly lose interest in Cambodia in a few years, and Cambodia will be left to struggle not only with whatever is left of the Khmer Rouge but with its neighbors as well. And of course any number of slip-ups are possible. Still, the world's powers have come up with a fine compromise to end the Cambodian war—probably the best compromise possible, given the unsavory nature of their negotiating partners, especially the Khmer Rouge and its Chinese patrons—and it seems terribly unjust that the Congress of the United States should make itself the obstacle in this tortured country's attempt to make the peace work.

ELIZABETH BECKER is the author of *When the War Was Over: Cambodia's Revolution and the Voices of Its People* (Simon and Schuster). Her new book, *America's Vietnam War: A Narrative History*, will be published by Houghton Mifflin in the spring.

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Good Morning, Midnight

By Ann Hulbert

Jean Rhys: Life and Work by Carole Angier

(Little, Brown, 762 pp., $35)

"I have only ever written about myself," Jean Rhys once said, admitting that "people have always been shadows to me." She elaborated on her failure of sympathy with a haunting image: "I do not know others. I see them as trees walking." In the landscape of her imagination, she was the only flesh and blood figure, wandering through a dark wood of threatening shapes, and even she could easily fade into mere shadow—as she did, in perhaps the most extraordinary literary life story of this century: in the 1940s she vanished from sight and was presumed dead, only to be rediscovered in 1956, a vengeful woman given to drunken rages who turned out to have one more novel in her, the much acclaimed *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Rhys's vision of alienation was at once childlike and world-weary, yet it was far from simple or jaded. Her sense of exile informed a long, unhappy life, and it inspired five short, bleak novels that explore and confound the categories of innocence and experience.

Born Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams on the island of Dominica in 1890, Rhys was an expatriate: she went to England when she was 16 and spent the rest of her life there, except for interludes in Paris. Yet she failed to follow the traditional expatriate pattern of detached outsider taking the measure of a new world. And she also failed to pursue anything like a conventional literary course, which has been one source of her fascination: Rhys has been hailed as a kind of down-and-out naïf, who started in a chorus line and ended up writing straight from her untutored, tormented soul.

In an essay about her, V.S. Naipaul described her journey, and her characters' journeys, as a struggle "from a background of nothing to an organized world with which her heroines could never come to terms." Neither she nor they suffer anything as straightforward as a fall; theirs is a more dizzying experience of unmoored drifting. One of her protagonists—it happens to be Julia in Rhys's second novel, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930), though it could have been Marya in her first, *Quartet* (1928), or Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), or Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), or Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*—describes it this way: "I felt as if all my life and all myself were floating away from me like smoke and there was nothing to lay hold of."

It's significant that Julia is overcome by that feeling not while she is lying in bed (where Rhys's heroines spend a great deal of time, sometimes with men, more often alone in dingy hotels, "horribly fatigued" and hung over) but after she has tried to give an account of her life and herself to a friend. Her story is a version of the standard fate that befalls Rhys's women, which is a version of Rhys's own fate after she arrived in England. Eager to flee Britain, Julia married and left for Europe, where she had a baby who soon died. When her marriage collapsed she went to Paris and scrounged work as an artist's model and a fashion mannequin, and she acquired the habit of "going from man to man," along with the habit of drinking. When the novel opens, she has been pensioned off by the latest of those men, Mr. Mackenzie, and has just learned that her weekly checks are about to come to an end.

Living that story has exhausted Julia into a kind of passive desperation, but trying to tell it leaves her feeling even more stranded; precisely when she attempts to "lay hold" of her life and her self, they prove least graspable. Yet her confrontation with the "smoke" of her existence beckons as a possible prelude to revelation: "I knew that if I could get to the end of what I was feeling it would be the truth about myself and about the world and about everything that one puzzles and pains about all the time."

Julia's sudden urge to understand leaps out as a thoroughly uncharacteristic moment in Rhys's fiction, but a key one. It can be read as Rhys's own statement of the impulse behind her writing, yet it has to be read carefully. What at first glance looks like metaphysical optimism is in fact far from that: Julia's "if" is a very big one. Rhys spent much of her life unable to rouse herself to the effort of self-examination; her writing was the exception rather than the rule of her existence. Her heroines, too, rarely have the stamina to "get to the end" of their feeling that their identities are dissolving. What efforts they do make suggest that the truth that awaits isn't likely to be comforting.

Rhys's writing and her characters' lives are not dedicated in any straightforward way to a search for meaning or motivation, or to an escape from puzzlement and pain. She and they are witnesses, not analysts, stark reporters of the details rather than the depths of their experience. That is not to say that Rhys was merely an unreflective transcriber of her experience. She had a method, and in fact if ever there was a method in tension with its matter, it is hers. The style of her novels is pristinely pared down in describing depravity and excess, perfectly balanced in evoking instability; she is a master of dialogue between characters for whom communication is mostly a lost cause. "Jean Rhys didn't explain herself," Naipaul wrote. "She might have been a riddle to others, but she never sought to make her experience more accessible by making it what it was not." In writing about the ordeal of loss—of self, of the past, of connection to others—she did not aim to apportion responsibility for it or to redeem it. That is the great peculiarity of her fiction, the source of its limitations but also of its strange power.

Carole Angier has bravely set out to do just what Rhys and her fiction resist: explain the woman and analyze the work. Any critical biography of Rhys was bound to be based on that tension, but just how incongruous the result can turn out to be is evident in Angier's undertaking. Her book is very long, more than 700 pages including notes, though Angier claims that she tried to "emulate Jean's economy": where the essence of Rhys's art is omission—writing was for her a painful process of cutting—the principle of this biography is inclusion, which often means repetition. Less immediately alarming than the garrulous style is a recurrent moralizing tone that could hardly be less in keeping with Rhys's own amoral, almost absurdist vision. As Angier chattily works to adjudicate between Rhys and the critics who accuse her of sordidness and self-pity, it's clear that the writer has found not a soul mate in her biographer, but something else she never had: a mother earnestly intent on understanding her wayward daughter.

Rhys's actual mother, Minna Lock-

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hart, looms as a difficult figure, which is perhaps no surprise, given Rhys's elliptical references to her childhood in her first four novels and her fuller allusions in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* In treating Rhys's youth in Dominica, Angier's zealous inclusiveness is illuminating. For even in Rhys's early fiction, where her heroines' pasts are left obscure, it's clear that some early drama of loss lurks behind their alienation.

Angier usefully fills in around Rhys's own suggestion that she had been harshly judged and banished by her mother, who served in the family as the voice of civilized, conformist England. (Her father, William Rees Williams, a moody Welshman with little nostalgia for the country he left behind, was much more in sympathy with his daughter and the ways of the island.) In a notebook, Rhys described a moment when her mother, after yet another in a long string of punishments, gave her "a long, sad look," and told her,

> "I've done my best, it's no use. You'll never learn to be like other people."
>
> There you are, there it was. I had always suspected it, but now I knew. That went straight as an arrow to the heart, straight as the truth. I saw the long road of isolation and loneliness stretching in front of me as far as the eye could see, and further. I collapsed and cried as heartbrokenly as my worst enemy could wish.

As Rhys admitted, the discovery that she was an outcast did not come as a real surprise: there had been no sudden expulsion from Edenic harmony. The sense of loss had always been there. Wittingly or not, amid all the explanatory and descriptive detail that Angier has amassed about the lush West Indian background, she manages to preserve the sense of Rhys as a born exile, a secretive child and a difficult adolescent whose isolation eludes any facile diagnosis.

When she was sent to school in England at 16—the routine path for a white girl on Dominica—Rhys felt she had been banished again, and her response was her own act of banishment. On the boat from Barbados, she wrote in her autobiography *Smile Please,* she coldly dismissed her life up until that moment: "Already my childhood, the West Indies, my father and mother had been left behind; I was forgetting them. They were the past." In part it was obviously defensive exaggeration: the defiant energy of her youth, her bond with her father and her difficulties with her mother, the lushness of Dominica and her envious fascination with the life of blacks on the island continued to shape her imagination in important ways.

At the same time, she was also telling the truth when she claimed that she erected a barrier of obliviousness between her past and her present. Again Angier's book is unexpectedly acute: though chock full of memories, Rhys's own and scores of other people's, it leaves room for the role that forgetting played in Rhys's life. An air of bewilderment about herself and her actions as she plunged, slightly dazed, from one setback to another is especially important in understanding her first decade or so in England. What Rhys tended to forget was the part that her own will played in charting her course, which was hardly the conventional English grooming that had been intended.

Instead, as Rhys was inclined to tell it, forces beyond her control—failure and abandonment—largely dictated her eccentric path, which led to a job in the chorus of a musical comedy at the age of 19. She had spent two unhappy years at the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge and then enrolled in Beerbohm Tree's Academy of Dramatic Art, from which she was forced to withdraw (her accent was hopeless, the administrator judged). Her father died, and she ended up scraping together a living as a chorus girl, because, she said, her mother was eager for her to stay away from Dominica and start supporting herself.

In fact, Angier shows that Rhys actively chose the life of touring chorus girl. While her father was still alive, she secretly went out and signed a contract, forced her family's approval, and persevered in her career after being fired from the first troupe. That's not to say that she was happy: she was intimidated by the audiences, discouraged by the drab towns and dingy theaters. And she certainly hadn't found a purposeful direction. Nightly performance was not what inspired her or the other chorus members; in good British demimonde tradition, they set their sights on the ultimate prospect of dependence—on a rich man who would fancy them on stage and woo them off of it.

According to Angier, Rhys felt immediately comfortable with the fatalistic expectations of the chorus girls' dimly lit corner of the world. "She shared their reliance on mascots, superstitions, lucky charms. Above all she shared their simple division of the sexes. Men were either protectors or exploiters; women were either winners or losers, and what they won or lost was men." Angier sets herself the task of complicating that stark perspective. In her treatment of Rhys's work, that means showing that the

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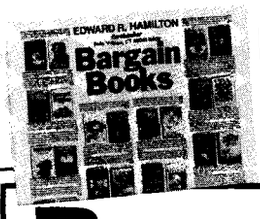

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heroines, who are rarely winners, are not simply the self-pitying losers they seem. In her treatment of Rhys's life, Angier devotes herself above all to constructing ambivalent portraits of the many men who played a part in it—Rhys's first love, Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith, who captivated her and then crushed her when he decided to end the affair; her first husband, a con man and writer named John Lenglet, with whom she left England to embark on a precarious existence in Europe; her second husband, long-suffering Leslie Tilden Smith, who saw her through several decades of productivity back in England; and her last husband, Max Hamer, who kept her company during the drunken scenes and unhappy poverty of her eclipse.

Although Angier doesn't emphasize it, her approach offers a refreshing corrective to the reflexive feminist angle on Rhys's career: as this biography makes clear, her life is hardly an object lesson in the domestic oppression of a creative woman. Rhys all but abandoned the daughter she had with Lenglet (it was he who raised her), and she made impossible demands on her husbands (she assaulted Tilden Smith and threw his typewriter—on which he had loyally typed out her nearly illegible drafts—out of the window). She was almost as hard on other solicitous friends.

What Angier wants to defend is a more old-fashioned, implicitly ennobling view of Rhys's career. To know the actual sordidness, self-pity, and self-loathing involved in Rhys's life with men, Angier suggests, is to appreciate the degree to which her art transcended those weaknesses. Where she wasn't able honestly to confront her guilts and needs in life, she had, or gradually came to have, the power to examine the wages of victimization on paper. In fact, Angier proposes, Rhys sacrificed the possibility of a less desperate life to her art. She argues that the very act of writing, because it entailed bearing witness to the often shameful truth of her experience, added to Rhys's "burden of guilt and self-hate." While she was "sealing the victory over herself in writing ... in her life her dark side was left in possession."

It's true that Rhys's life was one long decline into embittered, finally half-mad loneliness, and that literary success brought if anything more misery. Angier's treatment of the most familiar turns in her career—the discovery of Rhys by Ford Madox Ford in the mid-1920s, and her re-emergence in the 1960s after two decades of silence—suggests how much exploitation, paranoia, and self-destructiveness accompanied even the brighter moments of Rhys's progress as a writer. In her affair with Ford, who published her first stories in the *transatlantic review*, literary inspiration seems to have gone hand in hand with personal degradation, as relations among Ford, his then companion Stella Bowen, and Rhys degenerated into violent acrimony. Similarly, her renaissance with *Wide Sargasso Sea* entailed both self-doubt and cruel ingratitude toward the many who helped her; the grim combination was exacerbated by drink. And during the years between her literary start and its end, even with Leslie Tilden Smith when she was doing most of her writing, the record is not much brighter. As Bowen wrote later, Rhys was "well acquainted with every rung of that long and dismal ladder by which the respectable citizen descended toward degradation."

But it's misleading to see the moral mess of Rhys's life as the price she paid for some moral victory she achieved in her art. Though creating versions of her life in fiction clearly was a disorienting ordeal, that wasn't because writing was a process of judging herself and apportioning blame among winners and losers. On the contrary, writing meant discovering that there really wasn't any settled "truth about myself and about the world and about everything that one puzzles and pains about all the time"; the revelation of Rhys's fiction is that oppressors and victims can be hard to distinguish, that innocence and experience can amount to deceptive illusions. She may have hoped to draw more reassuring, conventional moral conclusions, but she didn't. What drink sometimes blurred and sometimes exaggerated in her life, her pen coolly conjured up in her work: a terror of solitude, and a lurking hatred of other people.

Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* offers a stark formulation of Rhys's underlying nihilism as she succumbs to an affair with Walter Jeffries, who is a typical Rhys lover, a protective but finally unreliable English gentleman whose tweedy embrace is inevitably followed by rejection. "I am hopeless, resigned, utterly happy. Is that me? I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely none. Just words." The most unsettling convergence of all in Rhys's fiction, the one that helps explain the other dissolving dichotomies, is the convergence of passion and passivity. Her heroines know deep desires, but they are desires for dependence; they can summon energy, but it is the energy to give themselves up. However fatigued they seem, they are not the mere innocent victims they appear at first glance. They are complicit in their own fate, which is finally to drift toward deadly indifference. "It's funny when you feel as if you don't want anything more in your life except to sleep, or else to lie without moving," Anna thinks at one point. "That's when you can hear time sliding past you, like water running."

Rhys herself fought against that fatal peacefulness with two weapons: her hate, and her fiction. The impulse to see her career as the victory, finally, of imagination over loathing is strong but too neatly rounded. Although Angier takes issue with one such reading—the view that Rhys's novels move from despair to the discovery of compassion between men and women—she succumbs to an edifying summary of her own: "Jean struggled from blindness to self-knowledge, from the rejection of blame to the acceptance of it. It cost her everything; but it was worth it."

The real story is more Rhysian. Her distinctive power as a writer lay in the convergence of imagining and hating, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, hailed as the triumphant creative culmination of a destructive life, in fact suggests that power was waning in her later years. Rhys set out to write a revenge story, taking as her heroine Bertha Mason, the madwoman in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The goal was to show how she was driven to try to destroy Mr. Rochester, who had come to the West Indies, married her for her dowry, and then, after a brief infatuation, coldly turned on her, destroying her already precarious sense of balance.

And yet, despite the animus behind it, the project undermined Rhys's characteristically corrosive vision. In some ways that was a liberation. The literary inspiration of the novel and its nostalgic portrait of Jamaica and Dominica have generally been celebrated as welcome signs of greater sympathy and scope: at last Rhys had managed to break out of the bleak autobiographical confines of the English story of lost female souls that had shaped her previous work. Her memories of her childhood homeland, transplanted to the nineteenth century, elicited a new ampleness in her evocation of place and character. And the bookish source of her undertaking roused Rhys to meet a radical challenge. Recognizing that her victim vs. villain drama threatened to be too programmatic, she stepped into a male character for the first time: it is Rochester who narrates the key middle section of the novel, in which his wife (whom Rhys named

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Antoinette) crosses the border from sanity to insanity.

But in straying from the stringent discipline of hate and in venturing into the psyche of the Other, Rhys ended up writing a novel that, despite its many local beauties, often feels fabricated as none of the rest of her fiction does. She set out to defend her heroine, and made her defenseless in precisely the way that her other women rarely are. Antoinette is the only heroine to embark on an actual act of revenge, and yet as she leaves the attic of Thornfield Hall with a lighted candle in hand and arson in mind, the violence in store feels less willed than the passivity to which Rhys's previous protagonists succumbed. Mr. Rochester, given the chance to explain himself, becomes curiously unconvincing compared with Rhys's earlier male characters, whose impenetrability was a crucial part of their allure and their cruelty.

A similar aloofness is an essential quality in Rhys herself and in her writing. The great strength of her fiction is also its potentially fatal weakness: the absence of easy sympathy. The starkly lit characters and the unforgiving authorial voice—which achieves a perfect pitch of self-mockery in *Good Morning, Midnight,* the most disturbing and virtuosic of all her novels—testify to a chilling world more eloquently than any moralizing might. And although those figures and that voice inevitably rouse curiosity about the life of the actual woman who created them, pursuing the biographical urge proves in the end to be the opposite of enlightening.

Perhaps the real contribution of this exhaustive book is finally to establish the grounds on which Rhys's reputation should rest, or at least the grounds on which it should not rest. Rhys's true claim on our attention, it's clear after hundreds of pages of mundane detail, has little to do with the legendary figure—the delicate face, the desperate life and its raggedly unliterary course. It lies in her accomplishments as a writer, though readers will have to turn to her books, not to Angier's commentaries on them, for proof of that. Rhys herself rarely gave in to the tragic illusion that her sordid life was the price she paid for her fiction. Instead, she sometimes managed a cruelly comic perspective. Her work, she once wrote in a merciless diary she kept, was the price she had to pay for dying: "I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure. It is that already to other people. But it will be an abject failure to myself. I will not have earned death." •

TRB *continued from page 6*

ever faster just to stay in the same place.

The study compares two-parent families with children in 1979 and 1989. For most, the wife's real hourly pay rose only slightly and the husband's actually declined. Except for the top fifth, any increase in total family income came from working longer hours, not from better pay for hours worked. If you're working harder to afford the same lifestyle, your standard of living has declined, even if the official standard of living statistics don't reflect that.

Working harder is not the answer for the American economy. We are already working harder, and it's getting us nowhere. Yes, the Japanese still put in more hours a year than we do, on average. Schor figures they outwork us by six weeks a year. She paints a convincingly gruesome picture of a society where "thousands of workers have become victims of karoshi, or 'death by overwork.' Otherwise perfectly healthy, they keel over at their desks...." (West Germans, on the other hand, work an average of eight weeks a year less than we do.) But longer hours cannot explain Japan's economic performance. That's because Japan's work hours have been decreasing, America's have been increasing, and even so their economy has been growing far faster than ours.

Since 1975 Japan's output per person has increased by almost half while America's has increased by a mere 12 percent. This Japanese achievement is not the result of working longer hours—Japanese work fewer hours than they did in 1975. It is mainly the result of Japan's high rates of savings and investment—including the social investment in education.

Thus Juliet Schor may be right for the wrong reason. America's desire for immediate and unending consumer gratification may or may not be leading us to work too hard, but it's definitely leading us to save and invest too little. Unless we curb our present appetites, we won't see the gains in productivity that could allow us to have more things and more time as well in the future.

But meanwhile, just don't call us lazy.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

say of state legislatures: "The inquiry constantly is what will *please,* not what will *benefit* the people." Of the people themselves, Hamilton complained that they "murmur at taxes, clamor at their rulers," and "change one incapable man for another more incapable."

Hamilton was a republican but feared that voters would not have the wisdom to elect the best among them to public office. I wonder if Hamilton would have any cause to change his opinion on these matters were he alive today?

TIM HACKLER
Alexandria, Virginia

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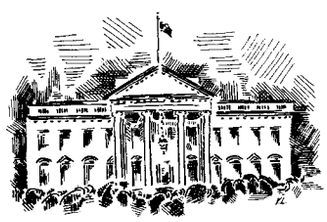
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Not home alone

THERE'S A SOCIOPOLITICAL FAULT line more basic than conservative/liberal, pro-life/pro-choice, religious/non-believer, upper middle class/lower middle class. It's the split between married folks with children and everybody else. I'm talking specifically about families with school-aged kids living at home. They're different. I'm always reminded of this when the question comes up, "What are you doin' this weekend?" As a parent with three kids at home (another in college), it rarely turns out that I'm doing the same things as friends who are single or married without children at home. They visit friends out of town, take in movies and plays, get up late, eat out, read without interruptions, go to parties—the good life. I chauffeur and chaperon, attend children's athletic practices and games, go to church, read intermittently, go to the movies, plays, and restaurants my kids like. I'm not complaining. It's the good life too, only child-driven.

I CONCEDE THE WAY PARENTS spend their time is a superficial difference between them and the rest of the world. But there are deeper differences, such as beliefs. People with schoolchildren tend to be more conservative and more religious than other people, and I'm convinced their family situation plays a big role in making them that way. Parents worry about issues that favor conservatives: crime, taxes, cultural values. They move to the suburbs, the most conservative areas of the country. The suburb where I live—Arlington, Virginia—had a conservative Republican heyday in the late 1960s and 1970s when it was populated mainly by families with kids. Since then the school population has dropped by half, and Arlington routinely elects liberal Democrats. As for religion, a lot of adults start thinking about spiritual faith when they have young children. They may not become religious zealots, but they're at least open to the idea that religion is a good thing.

LET ME ANTICIPATE THE COUNterargument to my theory, namely that I've got the cart before the horse. People who are already conservative and religious have kids and move to the suburbs, not the other way around. Being married with kids at home is not a cause but an effect. Nonsense. Take my own case. Married without kids in 1968, I voted for Dick Gregory for president (yep, the black comedian). With one child in 1972, I moved slightly rightward and voted for George McGovern. With a second kid on board in 1976, I opted for Gerald Ford. In 1980 I not only started going to church, I voted for Ronald Reagan. In other words, the kids came first. As they grew and my life became more focused on them and their activities, I got more conservative and religious. OK, maybe one person's experience is not exactly proof. But I'm not alone. Practically everyone I know is far more conservative and religious now than they were when single or married but childless—everyone, that is, except those still single or without kids around. Why is it that there are so many radicals on college campuses, but so few among people in their late 20s, 30s, and 40s? It's because they get married, have kids, and change. One more thing. While families with young kids don't move to close-in suburbs like Arlington as often as they used to, they obviously have to live somewhere. They wind up in the far-out suburbs, or exurbs, where there's affordable, single-family housing. And guess what? The exurbs—places such as Gwinnett County outside Atlanta and Ventura County north of Los Angeles—are now hotbeds of conservatism and religious revivalism. Just goes to show.



ALL THIS LEADS ME TO THE SUBject of *Hook*, the hit movie. I have no demographic figures to prove it, but I'll bet the audience for *Hook* consists largely of parents and their kids. Movies are a frequent topic of conversation among parents. They're always looking for one to see with their children that doesn't thrill the kiddies but numb their own mind or delight them but bore the youngsters. Not many movies qualify. When one does, word spreads fast. I was ready to skip *Hook* on the basis of sour reviews. Then I heard from someone who'd seen it. So I took my two youngest kids, and we loved it. Other parents and kids had the same experience, making *Hook* a cult film for suburban families. I'd be surprised if it's wildly popular with any other group.

NEWT GINGRICH, THE HOUSE Republican whip, says Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign is "silly" because Pat is a TV commentator who's not ready to jump into the Oval Office and "negotiate the fate of the world." Moreover, he wouldn't know how to run a country that's so big and complex. There are good reasons to oppose Buchanan, but political inexperience and lack of management training aren't two of them. Buchanan spent eight years at the White House (six for Nixon, two for Reagan), which ought to be experience enough. What's silly is Gingrich's assumption that only years of spinning one's wheels in the mindless atmosphere of Congress or a statehouse qualifies one for sensitive Oval Office deliberations. And what's equally absurd is the notion that the president manages anything. The president sets policy, gives speeches, serves as the symbol of the country. Ronald Reagan, who couldn't manage his family, muddled through. President Buchanan wouldn't have trouble with management. Wrongheaded policies would be his downfall.

ONE OF BUCHANAN'S WORST ideas, bringing most or all of America's troops home from overseas, rarely gets rebutted. Some Democratic presidential candidates, such as Tom Harkin, actually like the idea. President Bush seems to fear it's so popular an idea that it'd be foolhardy for him to argue the case for keeping American boys in Europe, Japan, Korea, etc. Too bad. The case is simple and compelling. The presence of American troops overseas gives the United States considerably more power and influence in the world than it would otherwise have. The complaint that Germany and Japan aren't paying their fair share for defense is irrelevant. We have more clout with Germany and Japan because our troops are there. Take them out and we'll have less. American foreign policy since 1945 has been most successful in precisely those areas where we've had a permanent troop presence (Germany, Japan, Korea, the Philippines) and least successful where we've had to dispatch troops in an emergency (Vietnam, Lebanon). Desert Storm is an exception. Just once, I'd like to hear a politician say, "Keep the boys overseas."

FRED BARNES

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Now, eight years and many road trips later, I'm sending my own people out to direct their first caucus. They understand, like I do, that the election process isn't always confined to big cities and large convention halls. In fact, sometimes the most important moments in democracy unfold in a school house...or in a town hall...or on a pig farm in Iowa.

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